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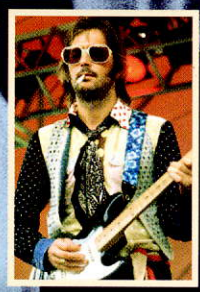

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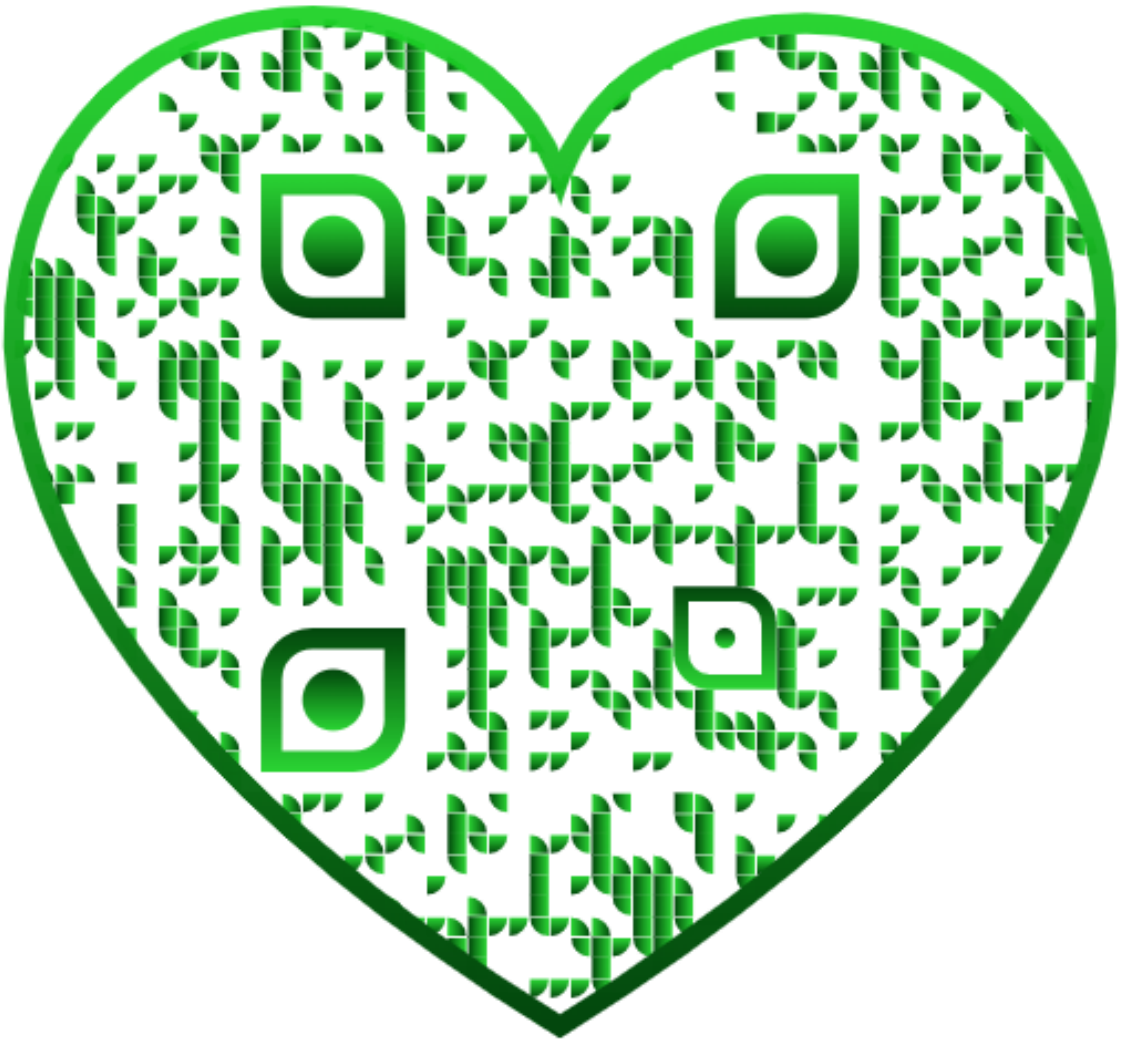

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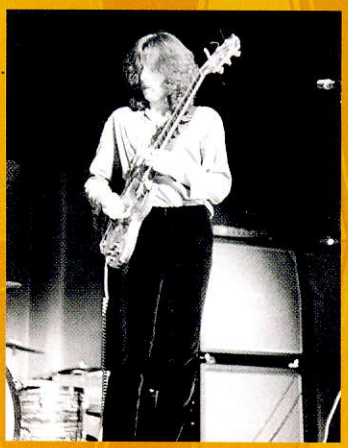
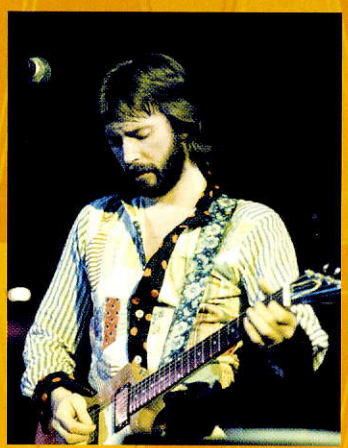
CROSSROADS

A brief history of the life and evolution of ERIC CLAPTON.

BY MAC RANDALL





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"I **TRY TO FIND** the places I've been before," Eric Clapton told an interviewer in the early Nineties. "To go back and find a phrase which has a meaning, that belongs to some part of my experience, is very valuable to me because it will put me in touch with something that may involve lots of thought processes that I had forgotten, which are still quite valid."

In this statement is the key to understanding most of Clapton's output in the past 15 years, a period in which he's enjoyed his greatest commercial success and highest level of mainstream fame. Having long ago proven everything he needed to as a musician—guitarists were calling him "God" when he was barely into his twenties—the Clapton of the late 20th and early 21st centuries has chosen to delve deep into his own history, reconnecting with the music, and sometimes the musicians, who inspired him in younger years. This is all a roundabout way of saying that to fully grasp the significance of what he's doing now, you have to be aware of his past. And few pasts are more illustrious than Eric Clapton's.

Eric Patrick Clapton was born in the southeastern English town of Ripley on March 30, 1945. He was the illegitimate son of a 16-year-old girl and a married Canadian army officer who had hightailed it back across the Atlantic before the boy was born. Clapton's mother soon vanished from his life in a similar fashion, moving to Germany and leaving him in the care of her parents, Rose and Jack Clapp (Eric's surname was borrowed from Rose's first husband, Reginald Clapton). For a time, Clapton believed that his grandparents were actually his parents. When Rose and Jack revealed the truth, he became depressed, withdrawn and a poor performer in school, failing the exams that would have enabled him to progress to university.

In previous eras, a young man in Clapton's situation would have been drafted into the armed forces. But the U.K.'s then-recent abolition of compulsory national service meant that he was free instead to enter the realm where so many sensitive youths with few career prospects ended up in the early Sixties: art college, the fabled crucible of British rock. Though Clapton had an aptitude for painting and graphic design, his interest in any kind of academics withered as music rapidly became the main focus of his life. He'd begun playing guitar in his early teens, inspired by the American blues of Big Bill Broonzy. By the age of 17, he was devoted to the instrument, and his intensive practicing interfered with his course work to such an extent that the Kingston College of Art expelled him.

Before long, Clapton had become a central figure in London's blues subculture, playing with a number of local bands and drawing praise for his powerful guitar style. In 1963, he joined the highly regarded Yardbirds, and on the one full-length album he cut with the group, 1964's *Five Live Yardbirds*, his solos bore a raw authenticity that left other Brit wannabe bluesmen in the dust. It was around this time that Clapton acquired the nickname "Slowhand," an ironic comment on both his speedy fingerwork and the slow handclaps he'd get from audiences while replacing broken strings onstage (a frequent occurrence). Clapton's tenure in the Yardbirds came to a messy end after the band had a major pop hit with "For Your Love" in 1965. The blues purist in him couldn't abide such a transparent grab for chart success. He jumped ship, to be replaced by Jeff Beck and, eventually, Jimmy Page.

Clapton's departure from the Yardbirds set the tone for the rest of his career, establishing him as restless and unwilling to commit to creative dictates that weren't his own. His next phase, as a member of John Mayall's Bluesbreakers, would last barely a year, but during that time he helped create what is generally regarded as the greatest British blues album ever recorded and arguably the greatest white blues album of all time: 1966's *Blues Breakers with Eric Clapton*. Having switched from a Fender Tele-

ABOVE WITH THE YARDBIRDS, IN 1964; RIGHT WITH FELLOW CREAM MATES JACK BRUCE (FAR LEFT) AND GINGER BAKER.

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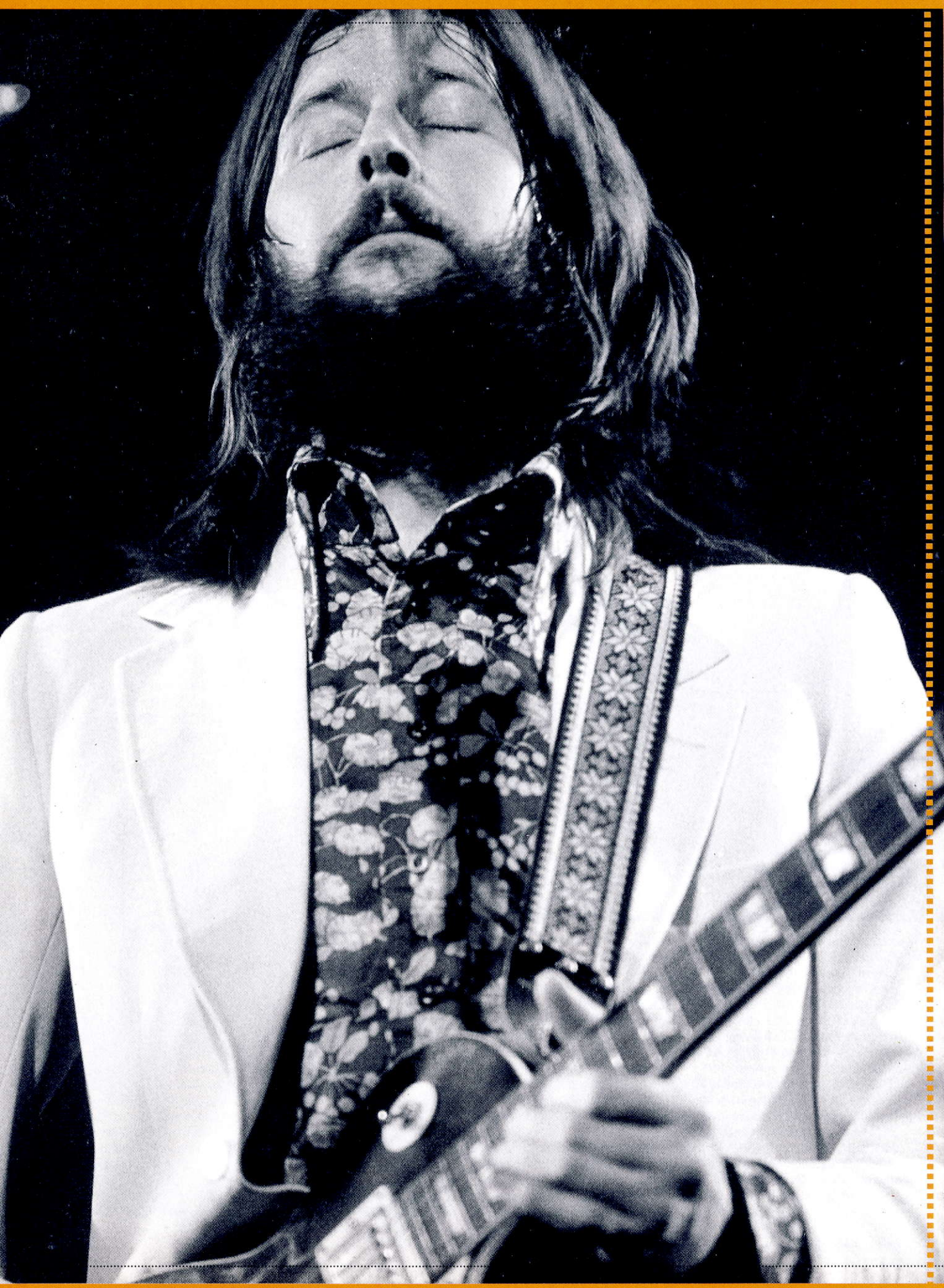
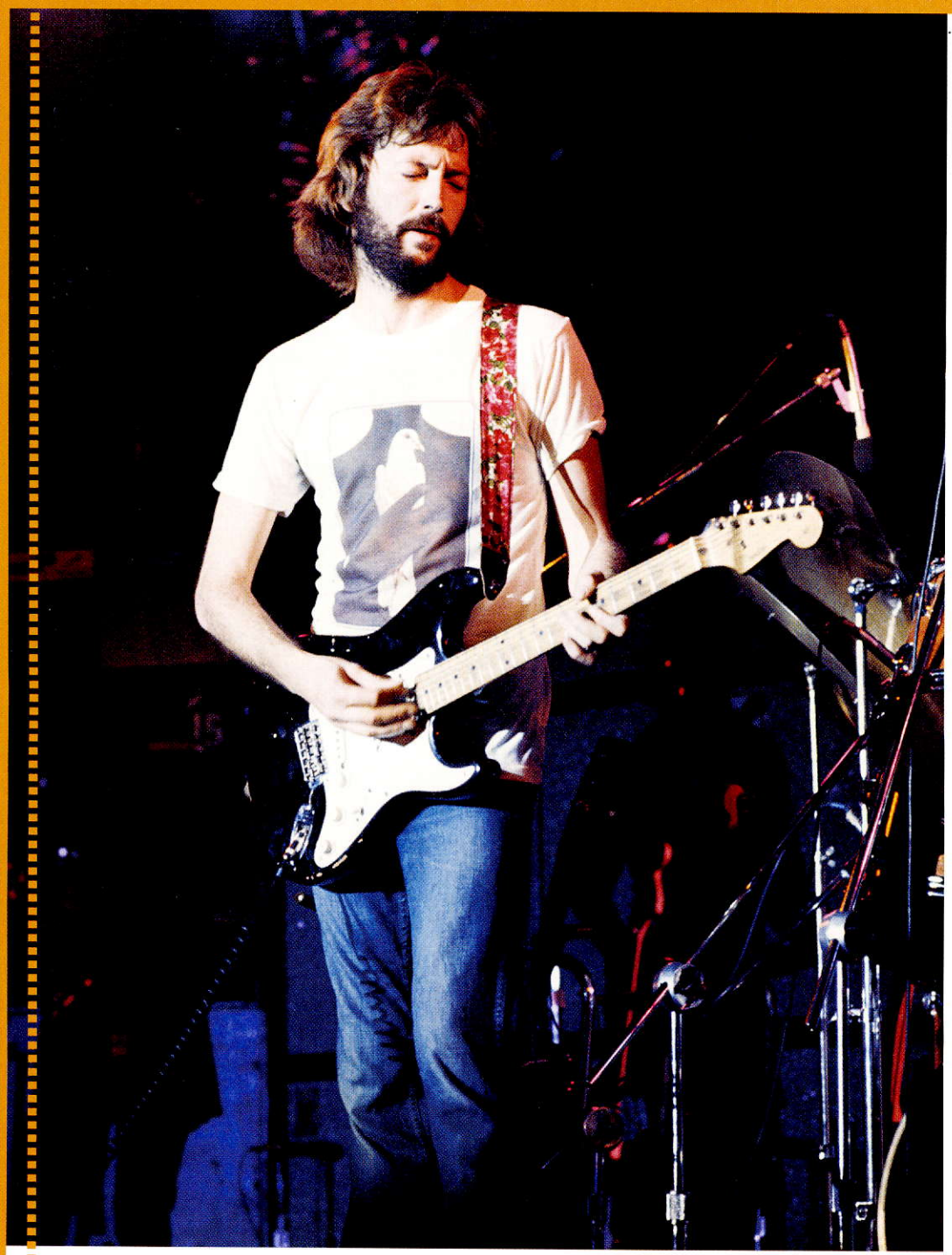




caster and Vox AC30 to a Gibson Les Paul and Marshall 1962, Clapton unleashed a scorching overdriven roar that's considered a pinnacle of electric guitar tone to this day. He also sang for the first time on record, covering his hero Robert Johnson's "Ramblin' on My Mind."

An apt title, to be sure, for by the time *Blues Breakers* was released, Clapton had already moved on to form Cream with bassist Jack Bruce and drummer Ginger Baker. The ultimate example of the power trio, Cream played blues rock with a psychedelic edge, a style they worked to perfection on hits like "Sunshine of Your Love," "White Room" and a supercharged version of another Robert Johnson song, "Crossroads." Over four albums and three U.S. tours, the band won America over with its lengthy jams, powered by Clapton's magisterial guitar. But in May 1968, the group's ascent came to a halt when Clapton read a scathing review of a Cream live performance in the then-new, hip magazine *Rolling Stone*. The article "said how boring and repetitious our performance had been," Clapton later recalled. "And it was true! The ring of truth had just knocked me backward; I was in a restaurant and fainted. And after I woke up, I immediately decided that that was the end of the band."

Within months, Cream was history and Clapton had formed a new band, Blind Faith, with Baker, Traffic singer/multi-instrumentalist Steve Winwood and bassist Rick Grech. Sadly, this early prototype of the supergroup quickly fell apart under the weight of outside expectations, leaving behind just one rough-edged, but appealing, studio album. A subsequent tour with American roots-rockers Delaney and Bonnie spawned Clapton's first solo record, simply titled *Eric Clapton*, in 1970. Although the album was successful and featured a Top 40 cover of J.J. Cale's "After Midnight," Clapton remained uncomfortable as a frontman. He went underground, bringing together several Delaney and Bonnie cohorts in a new configuration that would eventually be called Derek and the Dominos. Joined in the studio by another brilliant guitarist, Duane Allman, they recorded the 1970 double-disc *Layla and Other Assorted Love Songs*. The album sold poorly at first, in part because many didn't realize it was Clapton's project, but both it and its anguished title song are now acclaimed as rock masterpieces.

The heartache so palpable in *Layla*'s grooves was real: Clapton had fallen in love with Pattie Harrison, the wife of his best friend, ex-Beatle George Harrison. Convinced his feelings would never be requited, he took refuge in drugs. By the end of 1971, Clapton was a serious heroin addict and had dropped out of music entirely. In 1974, after a traumatic withdrawal, he re-emerged as a solo artist once and for all with *461 Ocean Boulevard*, which helped introduce reggae to a wider audience via its hit version of Bob Marley's "I Shot the Sheriff." But Clapton's addiction hadn't really disappeared; it had just switched its allegiance from heroin to alcohol and would continue to dog him for years to come.

At first, the music didn't seem to be affected. The albums he released in the late Seventies include one of his all-time best, *Slowhand* (1977), which boasted such evergreens as "Cocaine" and "Wonderful Tonight." Clapton got the girl, too, marrying Pattie in 1979 with faithful friend Harrison in attendance. However, his luck ran out in the early Eighties, and life-threatening bouts with bleeding ulcers and pleurisy finally led him into rehab in 1982.

The new, clean Clapton became an even bigger star in the Eighties, but for the first time he seemed to lack confidence in his direction. The eclectic *Behind the Sun* (1985), produced with Phil Collins, unsettled the heads at Warner Brothers, who insisted that five tracks be scrapped and replaced with more commercial material. Uncharacteristically, Clapton caved to the label's demands, and the finished album, along with its successor, 1986's *August* (another collaboration with Collins), made longtime fans wonder where Slowhand's

NEIL ZLOZOWER

TOP: EVERETT COLLECTION; BOTTOM: CARL STUDNA/RETNA

edge had gone. By the end of the decade, however, Clapton had regained his self-assurance. *Journeyman* (1989) was his strongest studio effort in over 10 years, and his live energy was undiminished, as he demonstrated most notably with a record-breaking 1990 residency at London's Royal Albert Hall, documented later on *24 Nights* (1991).

By this time, his relationship with Pattie had dissolved, and Clapton had taken up with Italian model Lory del Santo. In August 1986, their son, Conor, was born. Tragically, in March 1991, the four-year-old fell to his death from a window of a New York apartment building. Stricken with grief, Clapton bared his feelings in the song "Tears in Heaven." The tribute received its debut at Clapton's 1992 appearance on MTV's acoustic performance series *Unplugged* and now stands as his biggest solo hit. The *Unplugged* album that followed has sold more than any other Clapton disc and won six Grammy Awards, including Album of the Year.

> **"THERE'S ALWAYS SOMETHING THAT I DID WRONG BEFORE THAT I HAVE TO MAKE AMENDS FOR."**
>
> —ERIC CLAPTON

The years since this bittersweet triumph have seen Clapton venture back and forth between the poles of tradition and experimentation. On pop-oriented albums like *Pilgrim* (1998) and *Reptile* (2001), he's dabbled with sampling and electronic beats. *Retail Therapy*, his 1997 techno-ambient collaboration with keyboardist/producer Simon Climie released under the name TDF, is a further testament to his interest in stretching boundaries. But these developments have been overshadowed by Clapton's deepening engagement with his first love, the blues. In 1994, he recorded an all-blues album, *From the Cradle*, on which he paid tribute to many of his musical idols. Six years later, he joined forces with one of those idols, B.B. King, for a delightful album of duets, *Riding with the King*. And in 2004, he devoted another full disc to the classic work of Robert Johnson with the heartfelt *Me and Mr. Johnson*.

But the Eric Clapton of the 21st century hasn't just been interested in returning to his blues roots; he's also been interested in revisiting several phases of his own past, and he's done so in ways that are surprising and unprecedented. In 2002, he reunited with John Mayall for a live performance in celebration of Mayall's 70th birthday; it was the first time the two had played together in over 35 years. Then, in 2005, Clapton got back together with Cream bandmates Jack Bruce and Ginger Baker for a series of magical shows at the Royal Albert Hall. Highlights of the group's four-night London stand were released on a CD and DVD, and later that same year, the trio electrified audiences at a few more shows at New York's Madison Square Garden.

Clapton's trip down memory lane didn't end there. In 2006, he teamed with J.J. Cale, author of such old Clapton chestnuts as "After Midnight" and "Cocaine," to record a laid-back set called *The Road to Escondido*. More recently, he toured the world with a band that included Austin guitarist Doyle Bramhall II and young slide guitar master Derek Trucks, of the Allman Brothers Band. The latter association reconnects Clapton with the spirit of the late great Duane Allman, with whom Clapton made some of his most enduring music in the early Seventies.

Why all this looking back? A remark Clapton made to the BBC in 2005 on the occasion of his 60th birthday may offer a clue: "I find I'm always looking for something to put right," he said. "Because there's always something that I did wrong before that I have to make amends for." Now 62 and secure in his position as one of the greatest guitarists to ever walk the earth, Eric Clapton wants nothing more or less than to set his own personal record straight. And as he continues to do that, he makes the millions of people who love his music very happy indeed. GL

TOP DURING HIS *MTV UNPLUGGED* PERFORMANCE, IN 1992

CREAM PERFORMING ON A FLATBED TRUCK DURING FILMING FOR THE MOVIE *IT WAS A SATURDAY NIGHT.* IN COPENHAGEN, FEBRUARY 7, 1968

JAN PERSSON/REDFERNS /RETNA

STRANGE BREW

ERIC CLAPTON, JACK BRUCE and GINGER BAKER gave birth to the power trio, redefined rock improvisation and sold millions of albums. For all their success, nothing could stop the Cream from curdling.

BY JOHN McDERMOTT

Reprinted from Guitar World, *November 1997*

DEZO HOFFMANN / REX FEATURES

THE YEAR WAS 1968, and guitarist Eric Clapton, bassist Jack Bruce and drummer Ginger Baker were sitting on top of the world. Or so it seemed.

In three short years, their band, Cream, had recorded a slew of brilliant hit singles, sold an astonishing 15 million records and redefined the role of the instrumentalist in rock. Their concerts, which usually sold out immediately, had become legendary for the trio's ferocious virtuosity and wild, blues-based improvisations that exploded with a jazzy sense of adventure.

But all was not well in Cream. The problem, it was whispered, was ego. And as the individual musicians' reputations grew and heads swelled, their amp rigs ballooned accordingly.

"Cream's last year was extremely painful for me," recalls Baker. "When we started in 1966, Eric and Jack had one Marshall each. Then it became a stack, then a double stack and finally a triple stack. By 1968, I was just the poor bastard stuck in the middle of these incredible noise-making things. It was ridiculous.

"I used to get back to the hotel and my ears were roaring. That final year damaged my hearing. The incredible volume was one of the things that destroyed the band. Playing loud had nothing to do with music. There was, in fact, one gig where Eric and I stopped playing for two choruses. Jack didn't even know. Standing in front of his triple stack of Marshalls, he was making so much noise he couldn't tell."

But while the band came to a crashing halt after three volatile years, it's nearly impossible to exaggerate the importance of Cream. They were rock's first power trio: they gave birth to the notion of the "rock virtuoso," laid the foundation for heavy metal, and inspired several generations of bands, from Black Sabbath to Van Halen to Smashing Pumpkins. And while they are best remembered for their sophisticated instrumental work, Cream also recorded some remarkable pop singles, including "Sunshine of Your Love," "White Room" and "Badge."

Cream came together in mid 1966 when Baker left the respected British rhythm-and-blues ensemble Graham Bond Organization, Bruce (formerly of Graham Bond) left Manfred Mann, and Eric Clapton, already a legend in Britain, left John Mayall's Bluesbreakers.

The group's formation was set in motion by Baker, who reached out to Clapton and won him over with his grand vision of "becoming the biggest pop group in the world."

"I had always liked Ginger," explained Clapton. "Ginger had come to see me play with John Mayall. After the gig, he drove me back to London in his Rover. I was very impressed with his car and his driving. He was telling me that he wanted to start a band, and I had been thinking about it too. It was a sort of coincidence—synchronicity, really. We were thinking the same thing at the same time."

Clapton agreed to join Baker's new group, but he unwittingly threw a wrench into the drummer's plans. Clapton made a special request that Jack Bruce be recruited as the group's bassist. Clapton had briefly played with Bruce at the tail end of his tenure with John Mayall and came away impressed by the bassist's skill. Unbeknownst to Clapton, Baker and Bruce were like oil and water. The relationship had proven to be so turbulent that Bruce, uncomfortable with Baker, had left the Graham Bond Organization even as their fortunes were rising.

So eager was Baker to form a partnership with Clapton that, despite his misgivings, he agreed to have Bruce come aboard. Clapton, still unaware of the tension between his new bandmates, witnessed its volatile nature at the new group's first get-together.

"We had our first talk-through rehearsal at Ginger's house in Neesden," remembered Clapton. "Those two had an argument right away. Jack had done an interview and let the cat out of the bag about the band. Ginger was upset about that, and the [*argument*] went along the lines of, 'There you go, you've done it again!'

"I thought, Wait, there's something going back here that I'm not aware of. The 'you've done it again' implied that this was sort of a pattern that existed before I knew either of them."

Dubbed the Cream by Eric

Clapton, with a nod to their much-heralded reputations as soloists, the group accepted an invitation to perform at the July 1966 Windsor Jazz & Blues Festival. Barely a month old and with precious few original songs to their credit, Cream performed spirited blues reworkings that thrilled the large crowd and earned them a warm reception.

The group expanded its budding European following on the strength of the singles "Wrapping Paper" and "I Feel Free," and *Fresh Cream*, its impressive 1966 debut album.

In America, Cream took longer to take hold. Despite the enduring popularity of songs such as "White Room" and "Crossroads," the group was hardly an overnight sensation. It arrived with little fanfare, and *Fresh Cream* struggled to find an audience. There was no *Ed Sullivan Show*, no Monterey Pop Festival—just hard work and a grinding tour itinerary filled with small club and college dates.

With the release of 1967's *Disraeli Gears*, however, the group's popularity exploded. Aided initially by "underground" FM radio airplay, Cream received an enormous boost when AM Top 40 radio, which had shunned the group as too hard and psychedelic, jumped on the bandwagon. That acceptance and exposure helped make "Sunshine of Your Love," the group's signature song, the largest selling single in the history of Atlantic Records up to that time.

Cream's adventurous music directly reflected the incredible confidence each member had in his own abilities. The group successfully blended a variety of influences spanning Delta blues, avant-garde poetry and psychedelic pop while forging a unique sound and style. Heartened by their success, Cream followed *Disraeli Gears* in grand fashion with the lavish, 1968 double album *Wheels of Fire*. While Frank Zappa's Mothers of Invention had previously established the viability of double records for rock artists, Cream's ambitious marriage of freewheeling studio recordings and raw live performances shot to the top of the charts.

On the surface, Cream was one hot and happy band. Unfortunately, despite their staggering success, they routinely teetered on the edge of destruction. The clashes between Baker and Bruce worsened and soon ensnared Clapton. By the time *Goodbye*, their fourth album, was issued in 1969, the group had, in November 1968, already celebrated its farewell via a filmed finale at London's Royal Albert Hall. Cream were finished, and neither Baker, Bruce nor Clapton could summon the energy to resolve their differences.

As Clapton told *Guitar World* in 1994, "It was very intense; it actually seems like we were together for four or five years, but in fact it was very short. My overall feeling about it now is that it was a glorious mistake. I had a completely different idea of what it would be before I started it, and it ended up being a wonderful thing, but nothing like it was meant to be.

"It was meant to be a blues trio. I just didn't have the assertiveness to take control. Jack and Ginger were the powerful, dominant personalities in the band; they sort of ran the show and I just played. In the end, I just went with the flow and I enjoyed it greatly, but it wasn't anything like I expected at all."

In 1997, around the time of the *Complete Cream* four-CD box set release, *Guitar World* caught up with Bruce and Baker, who had apparently resolved their long-standing differences to the point where they could discuss Cream and their friend Eric Clapton. Joining them were Cream lyricist Pete Brown and producer/engineer Tom Dowd.

GUITAR WORLD Whose idea was it to form Cream?

JACK BRUCE Forming Cream was absolutely Ginger's idea. He asked Eric to join, and then Eric suggested that they get me to sing and play bass. I had only sung one or two numbers with Graham Bond, but Eric could see that there was some potential there. Ginger then had to come and ask me—which I thoroughly enjoyed!

GW Ginger, when did you become convinced of Cream's potential?

GINGER BAKER I knew we had something special from the very first time we played together. We got together at my little maisonette on Braymore Avenue, in back of which was a park where all the local kids used to play. It was summer and, as we played anyway, the kids congregated on this little hill behind my place were boogying. They really enjoyed the music. It was total magic immediately. We were three people made to play with each other.

GW What happened next?

BRUCE There was a kind of plan in place when we started. We did some rehearsals in a church hall, learning how to play with each other. We were trying out songs and preparing for a couple of shows, including an unannounced gig at the Twisted Wheel in Manchester.

BAKER Cream went straight onto the same club circuit that Graham Bond had been doing. I went to Graham's booking agent, Robert Masters, and said, "Look, you've got to charge more money." Masters said that no one would pay it, but I insisted that we be paid 45 pounds a gig instead of the 40 pounds that Graham was getting, and everybody paid it!

I had to keep prompting them to ask for more money, and every time they did, people would pay it. The band's reputation was huge before it was formed, really.

GW When did the group begin to stand on its own?

BAKER When Cream started to get going, our manager, Robert Stigwood, was paying a lot of attention to the Bee Gees. He would be taking out huge ads in [*the British music magazine*] *Melody Maker* for them, while the Cream would get a two-line mention. Stigwood was convinced that the Bee Gees were going to be the biggest hit of the Sixties. I don't think he really started to get behind Cream until *Fresh Cream* was released in the U.S. by Atco. When the first album went into the charts in America—albeit at something like No. 198 or whatever—Stigwood was flabbergasted. Eric, Jack and I were convinced. We knew what we had. But I don't think Stigwood came around until he saw that we might actually make some money.

It was pretty obvious that Cream was something special. I had been playing the circuit for three years with the Graham Bond Organization, and we would draw an average of 800 people for a big pub gig. When we went out with Cream to the same places, there was suddenly 1,500 people. The places were packed solid and there was often as many people outside gigs as there were inside. The venues just weren't big enough to let all the people in.

GW What was the first original Cream song developed by the group?

BRUCE When Cream got started, I began to think about writing singles. I was very enamored of the Beatles, like everybody else at the time. I was impressed by what they were doing with their two-and-a-half-minute singles. However, what I came up with instead was "N.S.U.," which was pretty freewheeling. It was unusual because of the length between the verses, but I was quite pleased with it.

GW Besides writing original material, you were also busy reinterpreting a series of blues masterworks, which became a major component of Cream's repertoire.

BRUCE Because of the interaction between the three of us, our version of the blues just naturally took on a different structure. "I'm So Glad," written by Skip James, was one of the first examples, and certainly Willie Dixon's "Spoonful" was something that we made our own.

At that time, bands like John Mayall's Bluesbreakers and Fleetwood Mac were trying to recreate the sounds of Chicago blues. Doing that was completely valid, but it was just something I didn't want to do. Those original blues records had been done so well, which meant you could only ever be second best. But, if you treated those songs with a great deal of love and respect, you could remake them into your own. When we later got to meet people like Muddy Waters in Chicago, they were knocked out by our approach and how highly we regarded their music.

GW How did lyricist Pete Brown, who was responsible for the words of songs like "Sunshine of Your Love" and "Tales of Brave Ulysses," become part of the creative team?

BAKER We needed someone to help us with songwriting, and Pete Brown immediately came to mind because I had played some gigs that fused jazz and poetry. As the jazz players sat onstage, the poets would come up and read their work in front of the audience. Pete Brown was one of the poets I really liked.

BRUCE Yeah, I was sort of given Pete Brown by Ginger. Ginger and Pete were at my flat, trying to work on a song, but it wasn't happening. My wife Janet then got with Ginger, and they wrote "Sweet Wine" while I started working with Pete.

PETE BROWN I received a call from Ginger, who said that his group had completed a song but needed to have words. I didn't really like rock and roll at that time. I didn't even like the Beatles—I just couldn't understand it. I was an avid jazz and blues fan. I had loved the Graham Bond Organization because it was made up of all these elements that I enjoyed.

Based on my admiration for the Organization, I went to see Cream, not knowing what I was about to get into. I knew something about song form, not very much, but I had listened to a great deal of music and developed good ears. Jack played me his song, and I understood the shape and rhythmic organization. I proceeded to unload every cinematic image that I had ever stored into this song. For some reason, he actually accepted it and the song became "Wrapping Paper," the band's first single.

GW So "Wrapping Paper" was the first successful Bruce/Brown composition?

BRUCE Yeah. But I'm not sure that we actually "succeeded" with "Wrapping Paper." What I was trying to do musically was play with people's expectations of us as a blues band. It *is* a blues song, but it doesn't have very obvious blues changes.

BAKER In retrospect, "Wrapping Paper" was pretty pathetic. [*laughs*] Especially when the credit came out as Bruce/Brown. We had all been involved in that. It was an attempt to do something really pop-styled. The whole object of Cream was to become a huge pop band.

GW How did you feel about your next single, "I Feel Free"?

BRUCE I was quite pleased with the way that "I Feel Free" turned out. Even though I hadn't had much experience in recording studios prior to Cream, I had very definite musical ideas about the songs I had written. I wrote all of "I Feel Free" out on paper, because that was the way I was still working in those days. Because of my classical background, it was easier for me to write things down and then try to realize them in the studio. I know that Ginger thought the song could have been recorded better, and we recut it, but after a little—shall we say—"discussion," it was agreed that we might end up losing what we liked by trying it again.

GW What was it like recording *Fresh Cream*?

BAKER We recorded the first album very quickly. It took something like 10 days. We were in complete control of our destiny. Robert Stigwood [*credited as the album's producer*] was rarely there at the start of the sessions. He turned up when the album was nearly finished.

The first album was something I was completely pleased with, to be quite frank. A lot of that album was made up of blues things that

"MY OVERALL FEELING ABOUT CREAM NOW IS THAT IT WAS A GLORIOUS MISTAKE."

—CLAPTON IN 1994

ABOVE CAFE AU GO GO, OCTOBER 1967

DON PAULSEN/MICHAEL OCHS ARCHIVE/GETTY IMAGES

Eric brought to the table, like "Cat's Squirrel" and "Rollin' and Tumblin'." We played those numbers live from the outset, and they always got the public going.

GW What do you remember about Cream's first American tour?

BAKER We were playing mostly at colleges for what seemed like extremely small money—only about three thousand bucks a gig. The first place we ever played was Murray the K's "Music in the Fifth Dimension" show in New York, and it was a fiasco. Murray was an influential New York DJ who put together these huge package shows that would feature dozens of bands. They wanted us to play three numbers and thought it would only take three minutes!

There were supposed to be four shows a night, and on the first night there was only time for three. The Who were also on the bill, and the show ran over by something like 80 minutes. Murray the K was freaking out. After the second show, he came to our dressing room to try to get us to cut down our set. I was lying under the table, having consumed a bottle of Baccardi. Murray saw me and said, "How's he gonna play?" I told him not to worry about me.

BRUCE It was very bizarre. The complete show by all the artists was only supposed to last two hours. We had been given three songs and were buried at the bottom of the bill. After the first show, we were cut back to "I'm So Glad." Then they wanted us to cut the length of that! Meanwhile, the spot for the Jackie the K Dancers, led by Murray's wife, seemed to get longer and longer. It was so wild that Murray the K had security guards to keep us in the building. That was our introduction to New York and the United States.

GW What do you recall about engineering Cream's second album, *Disraeli Gears*?

TOM DOWD I got a call from [*Atlantic Records label chief*] Ahmet Ertegun late one afternoon, asking me to record a group that Robert Stigwood had sent over from England. Ahmet told me to get whatever I could out of them before their visas expired. When I arrived at the studio the next morning, the roadies were loading in these double stacks of Marshall cabinets and double-bass drums, and I thought, What the hell is this? I hadn't known anything about them except the fact that they were a three-piece and that two of the three could sing lead.

GW In addition to Tom, Felix Pappalardi, the late bassist and songwriter, made significant contributions to the group's sound. How did Felix get involved?

BAKER That came about during *Disraeli Gears*. We had no real game plan for making the album. The first thing we cut was the traditional blues "Hey Lawdy Mama," and Felix was at the session as a guest of Ahmet Ertegun. At the end of the session, he asked if he could take a copy of the tape away to write some words for it. He came back the next day with "Strange Brew." Felix got Eric to sing the lead because he had done so for "Hey Lawdy Mama." All of this didn't go down so well with Jack, because he considered himself to be the lead vocalist.

Anyway, Eric and I were both very impressed with Felix. We had some discussions with Ahmet and Tom Dowd and afterward got Felix to come in and produce the album. He got very involved musically. Ahmet was also at the studio almost every day. I was also extremely impressed with Tom Dowd, who was an absolutely amazing engineer. Actually, he wasn't just an engineer—it was like having another musician around.

DOWD Felix usually sat out in the studio while I was recording in the control room—especially dur-

ing playbacks. He would point out certain things to each band member where he felt improvements could be made. There was a lot of dialog between Felix and the three of them. Some of it was specific to the session, but it also included exposing them to the styles of different artists and sounds.

GW How did "Sunshine of Your Love" develop?

BRUCE Pete Brown and I had been working all night, trying to write stuff, and we hadn't got anywhere. I picked up my double bass and played the riff. Pete looked out the window, saw that the sun was coming up, and wrote, "It's getting near dawn/And lights closed their tired eyes..."

BROWN Eric added the hook. Funny enough, I never liked it, although it makes a lot of sense, musically. I didn't like the title, "Sunshine of Your Love." I suppose, though, that it hit the mark with so many people because it was such a broad idea. In the long run, thank you, Eric! But in the short term, I must admit I was pretty miserable about it.

BRUCE I knew "Sunshine of Your Love" was going to go over well because both Booker T. Jones [*keyboard player of Booker T. & the MGs*] and Otis Redding heard it and told me it was going to be a smash. Their opinions really meant a lot to me.

GW Where did Cream's tradition of long, extended individual solos first take root?

BRUCE When we started out, a typical rock band set lasted only 45 minutes. When we got to the Fillmore West, in San Francisco, the audience wanted us to stretch out. I remember them shouting, "Just play!" That's exactly when we started to play longer. It became a kind of trademark for us, which, in a way, was a mixed blessing. It was very difficult to do

CREAM WAS FINISHED, AND NEITHER BAKER, BRUCE NOR CLAPTON COULD SUMMON THE ENERGY TO RESOLVE THEIR DIFFERENCES.

DEZO HOFFMANN / REX FEATURES/EVERETT COLLECTION

UNBEKNOWNST TO CLAPTON, BAKER AND BRUCE WERE LIKE OIL AND WATER.

every time we played, and it took its toll. I used to think of it like the Who smashing their instruments: it's expensive to have to do that night after night. For us to have to do very long improvisations every night was expensive on our brains!

GW The *Wheels of Fire* sessions in June 1968 were really productive and yielded a number of classic Cream songs. How did "White Room" evolve?

BRUCE I had written words to the song—almost scat words—which started off about cycling through France. I had a definite idea about the feeling I wanted the song to have, and Pete came up with a set of lyrics. Together, we rewrote and rewrote until we had something we were both very happy with.

BROWN My draft of "White Room" started its life as an eight-page poem. Because I had had some spurious journalistic training at college, I was able to pare my eight-page poem to a single page of lyrics.

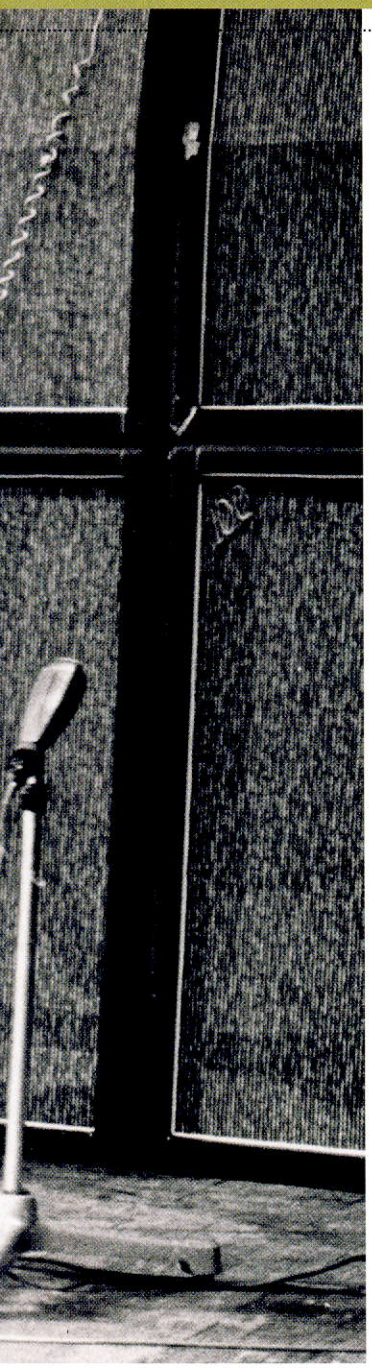
BRUCE Musically, "White Room" was inspired by Jimi Hendrix. Jimi had a way of using chord changes and taking traditional ideas and modernizing them. He was a big fan of the band, and we certainly loved his music.

GW The acoustic "As You Said," from *Wheels of Fire*, was an interesting departure for the band.

BRUCE I wanted Eric to play guitar on that track, but he encouraged me to do it. I was always embarrassed about my acoustic guitar playing—especially having Eric Clapton in the band. But [*folk singer*] Richie Havens showed me this great opening tuning, and I wanted that guitar sound on the track. When I had the music completed, I went to Pete. He had these words already written which fit right on top of what we had done. It was perfect.

GW "Politician" is another memorable track from those ses-

JAN PERSSON / REDFERNS / RETNA



ABOVE BAKER AND CLAPTON AT REHEARSAL FOR CREAM'S FIRST SHOW IN DENMARK, MARCH 6, 1967

ROBERT KNIGHT

sions.

BRUCE We were scheduled to perform on the BBC and needed a song. Pete had given me the words, which had a great blues feel to them. Eric and I were jamming and trying to come up with a lick. There was no big writing session or anything like that. It came together quickly, and we performed it for the first time on that radio program.

GW By the time *Wheels of Fire* was being recorded, the Bruce/Brown team had begun to outpace both Eric and Ginger as songwriters. Did that affect the band negatively?

BRUCE The sessions for *Wheels* were very productive, but I think problems were beginning to emerge, because Eric and Ginger weren't coming up with as much original material. I wasn't even particularly happy that a lot of the songs were coming from Pete and me. Eric and Ginger were beginning to write some great stuff, but just not as fast. I would have preferred that management let us have a few months to work on new material, because that would have kept us moving forward.

BROWN My poetry background had me prepared for writing on demand. I had also stopped drinking and taking drugs, which helped a great deal. Jack was bubbling over, full of new ideas. Once he and I had established a way of working, there was a wellspring of material that came quite quickly. I tried to write with Eric and Ginger, but it didn't seem to work out. Possibly it was due to chemistry, as Ginger was able to collaborate with Mike Taylor on a number of things, but we were never able to really connect.

GW As engineer for most Cream sessions, Tom, did you notice tension in the band during the *Wheels* sessions?

DOWD With *Disraeli Gears*, once Ahmet felt that the group was comfortable, he left the details to Felix and me. Apart from my tape operator and a roadie or two, there was nobody else around.

When the group came back to record *Wheels of Fire*, there was a whole different set of circumstances. I knew that there had been some animosity among the three players, but when we would listen to playbacks in the control room, there were times when I thought they were going to kill each other.

BROWN I know there was some resentment from Eric and Ginger, but songs were needed and Jack and I were there with the songs—good songs, which have stood the test of time.

BAKER The problem wasn't that Jack and Pete were writing songs; the bone of contention was whether they should get all the credit for them. It still rankles me that I got no credit whatsoever for contributing heavily to the arrangement of two of Cream's most popular tunes. The whole way "Sunshine" turned out was totally my input, and I've never even received a thank you for it. Also, the whole introduction to "White Room"—the 5/4 "Bolero" thing—was my input to the tune. When both songs came out, I wasn't even mentioned. This happens to many drummers.

GW With the group's tremendous success, couldn't anything be done to mend the personal disputes?

BAKER Not really. The problems started very early on. Actually, the only thing that held the band together *was* its success.

BRUCE In addition to the band's creative tensions, there really was a lack of foresight or belief on behalf of the management. We worked much too hard. Three guys on the road, away from their friends and families for three long tours—that can be pretty destructive to a band. We certainly weren't the first band that wasn't helped by those circumstances.

GW Was Clapton's discovery of the Band's *Music from Big Pink* a factor in the group's breakup?

BRUCE Like a lot of people, Eric was deeply influenced by that album. We fell in love with the economy of that record and began to think that what we were doing was okay, but maybe kind of florid. I think the idea of us getting back to the roots indicated to me that we had lost a bit of our confidence in what we'd been doing.

GW Clapton has often spoken of *Rolling Stone* magazine's condemnation of the band as another factor behind his decision to leave. [*In the May 11, 1968, issue, writer Jon Landau delivered a lengthy critique of Cream in concert, citing "one-dimensional" improvisations that "made no use of dynamics, structure, or any of the other elements of rock besides drum licks and guitar riffs." In July that year, the magazine printed editor Jann Wenner's remarkable assertion that "Cream is good at a number of things, unfortunately songwriting and recording are not among them."*] Was this really an issue?

BAKER The article had a very detrimental effect on Eric because he thought that *Rolling Stone* had a lot of credibility. He was a very sensitive fellow, and I'm convinced that the article did him a great deal of harm. It was his favorite magazine, and to read something like that in it hurt him.

BRUCE I remember that article very well. That certainly contributed to the end of Cream, but it was really quite silly. It tried to say that Eric Clapton couldn't play the guitar. That was the kind of thing one would expect from the English music press, not *Rolling Stone*. It certainly hurt me, because they questioned our integrity. We were always sincere about music, right up until the end.

BAKER On the last U.S. tour, after a gig in Texas in 1968, Eric came to me and said, "I've had enough." And I said, "So have I." And that was it. We decided, for different reasons, that it was all over. When Cream died, it died. Short of murder, we couldn't solve a problem between us.

GW While Cream decided to disband, you agreed to record *Goodbye*, a farewell album, and perform a November 1968 farewell concert at London's Royal Albert Hall. Why?

BAKER We wanted to go out on an up note. That's why we did the album and the show at the Albert Hall. In fact, when we performed that last show, we were just blown away by the emotion from the audience. It went so well that we all wondered—just for a moment—if we had made the right decision, to split up. GL

TIME PIECE

Blues purist. Guitar god. Pop star.
ERIC CLAPTON
has been all these and more.
In this exhaustive, wide-ranging interview,
rock's great survivor
reflects on his tumultuous journey.

BY DAVID MEAD

Reprinted from Guitar World, *December 1994*

MICHAEL OCHS ARCHIVES/
GETTY IMAGES

CREAM-ERA CLAPTON BACKSTAGE AT THE MURRAY THE K "MUSIC IN THE FIFTH DIMENSION" SHOW AT THE RKO THEATRE, NEW YORK CITY, MARCH 31, 1967

IN 1994, AFTER 30 years in the business as a blues-influenced rock and roll electric guitarist, Eric Clapton finally got down to the business of recording a blues album of his own. From the Cradle was a far cry from the fast-and-loose style of blues tribute tossed off by less-reverent players; it was a collection of authentic blues songs played on instruments from the period and constructed with the loving care of a man who has a reputation for nitpicking perfection in everything he does. Ironically, the album was recorded in the very studio where, as a member of the British group the Yardbirds, Clapton had cut the band's first single, "I Wish You Would." Located in London, England, Olympic Studios has been the site of numerous recordings he has made throughout his long career. The studio made the perfect setting for Clapton to reflect upon his past and discuss the guitarists whose work is at the heart of his own.

ERIC CLAPTON I'm recording this album as much as I can with everybody on the floor at the same time—horns and everything. We're trying not to overdub anything at all, so mistakes and everything go in.

GUITAR WORLD A bit like the old Chicago days?

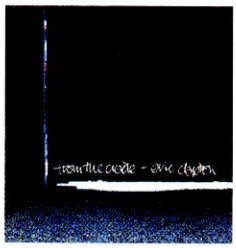
CLAPTON Yes, I suppose so—although I think even *they* overdubbed sometimes. But for the purpose of getting it the way I want it to feel, I want everything live.

GW In a way, this studio is your old stomping ground, isn't it?

CLAPTON This is where a lot of the early stuff was done. This is my idea of a recording studio; I came here more than anywhere else, and it's between where I was born and where I used to hang out. It's in the middle of all of my stomping grounds, and I think I must have recorded here with just about every outfit I ever played with—although I don't think John Mayall came here.

GW Can you remember what it was that turned you on to music in the beginning?

CLAPTON Well, the first thing that rang in my head was black music—all black records that were R&B or blues oriented. I remember hearing Sonny Terry and Brownie McGhee, Big Bill Broonzy, Chuck Berry and Bo Diddley, and not really knowing anything about the geography or culture of the music. But for some reason it did something to me—it resonated. Then I found out later that they were black; they were from the deep South and they were American black men. That started my education.



In fact, the only education I ever really had was finding out about the blues. I took a kind of elementary, fundamental education in art, but it didn't rivet my attention in the same way as blues did. I mean, I wanted to know *everything*.

I spent all of my mid-to-late teens and early twenties studying the music; studying the *geography* of it, the *chronology* of it. The roots, the different regional influences and how everybody interrelated and how long people lived and how quickly they learned things and how many songs they had of their own and what songs were shared around. I mean, I was just into it, you know? I was learning to play it, as well, and trying to figure out how to apply it to my life. I don't think I took it that seriously as a potential profession, because when you're young, you don't; it was only when other people showed an interest that I realized that I could make a living out of it.

GW What about your choice of instrument? When did you first hear the guitar and think, That's what I want to play?

CLAPTON I think that when I heard early Elvis records and Buddy Holly—when it became clear to me that I was hearing an electric guitar—then I think I wanted to get near it. I was interested in the white rock and rollers until I heard Freddie King; then I was over the moon! I knew that was where I belonged, finally. That was serious, proper guitar playing, and I haven't changed my mind ever since. I still listen to his music in my car, when I'm at home, and I get the same boost from it that I did then.

GW The first guitar of yours was a Hoyer, wasn't it?

CLAPTON Yeah, it was a Hoyer acoustic.

GW Did it have nylon strings or metal?

CLAPTON Funnily enough, it looked like a gut-stringed guitar, but it was steel-stringed. An odd combination.

GW But it wasn't too long before you got your first electric?

CLAPTON I got a Kay double-cutaway. I got one because Alexis Korner had one.

GW That can't have lasted too long either, because by the time you were in the Yardbirds, you were using Telecasters and Gretsches.

CLAPTON It didn't stand up too well. I think the neck bowed, and it didn't seem to me that you could do much about it. It had a truss rod, but it wasn't that effective, and the action ended up being incredibly high. I remember at some point I didn't want it to look like it looked any more, and so I covered it in black Fablon [*vinyl adhesive shelf paper*]! Can you imagine what it sounded like after that? Let alone what it looked like?

I ended up with the ES-335TDC and then I got into Fenders. I had a Telecaster and a Jazzmaster.

GW What was it like for you when you started playing in the clubs?

CLAPTON Well, anybody that had any idea of how to play any instrument could just about hold their own, because there was no competition—there was no one around. There was only a handful of bands, and anyone that could play Sam and Dave, Stax and Motown was a master. I came from the blues, and so I had a grasp of that kind of thing; to my reckoning, R&B came from the blues, so I felt I was in some kind of inner sanctum, mentally or spiritually or whatever. If you could play anything in a halfway convincing fashion, you were the boss. If you were pretty good, you could work all the time and you'd get fairly well paid and be successful. It was easy to be successful if you had what was necessary, which was the right musical taste.

GW It's a historical fact that, in the early part of the Sixties, it was practically impossible to get the electric guitar sounds heard on blues records using British-made amps. How did you overcome that?

CLAPTON Just by turning them flat out! I though the obvious solution was to get an amp and play it as loud as it would go, until it was just about to burst. When I was doing that album with John Mayall, it was obvious that if you miked the amp too close, it would sound awful. So you had to put the mic a long way away and get the room sound of that amp breaking up.

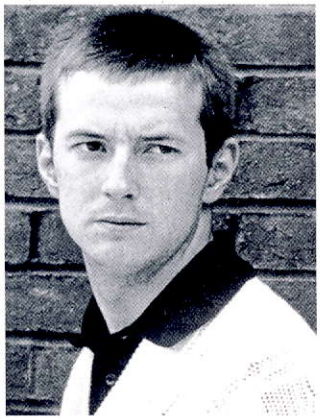
GW That was when you discovered Marshalls, wasn't it?

CLAPTON Yes.

GW What were you using prior to joining the Bluesbreakers?

CLAPTON I was using Vox AC30s and things like that, but they didn't do it for me. They were too "toppy"; they didn't have

CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT: WITH JOHN MAYALL AND THE BLUESBREAKERS; CIRCA 1966; WITH BLIND FAITH; CIRCA 1963; WITH THE YARDBIRDS



CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT: MICHAEL OCHS ARCHIVE, GERED MENKOWITZ, LFI, MICHAEL OCHS ARCHIVE, MICHAEL OCHS ARCHIVE

any midrange at all.

GW Did you use anything to drive the front end, or did you just crank them right up?

CLAPTON Cranked them right up and *still* they didn't distort, as far as I can remember. They may have distorted, but I can't remember that they did so in an attractive way. It didn't really get *thick*; it just got edgy.

GW Did you harbor any romantic feelings for that period at all? I think it was Mark Knopfler who said that in some ways he misses the old days, where you could show up at a club with an amp and a guitar and just do a gig.

CLAPTON Well, yeah, that's true. Although I don't picture myself doing that these days. It's funny for me now to think of walking into a club and seeing another band play. I do it every now and then and it all comes back to me, and I feel like this is where I belong. I mean, I grew up playing in clubs; that is my spiritual stomping ground. And every time I walk into a club, I feel like I'm going to be asked to play, but I *don't* get asked to play.

Back in the Sixties, if you did go into a club to see someone play, you already knew those people; there was no intimidation, no inhibitions at all. It was just that you hung out with these people and you played with them all the time, so in that respect I miss that camaraderie. There *was* competition, but it was friendly; now I think it's much more aggressive. I went through that [*being a*] "dinosaur" thing 10 years ago, so God knows what it's like for me to show up somewhere now! I don't know what they think of me now if I walk into a club. What do I represent to young players? I have no idea. I don't know where they've gone in their heads now, what they think, what their influences are. It probably has nothing to do with what my contribution was. I have no idea.

GW Let's talk about the whole "Clapton is God" thing. Were you uncomfortable with it?

CLAPTON I thought it was quite justified, to be honest with you! [*laughs*] I suppose I felt that I deserved it for the amount of seriousness that I'd put into it. I was so deadly serious about what I was doing. I thought everyone else was either in it just to be on *Top of the Pops* or to score girls or for some dodgy reason. I was in it to save the fucking world! I wanted to tell the world about blues and to get it right. Even then I thought that I was on some kind of mission, so in a way I thought, Yes, I *am* God; quite right. My head was huge! I was unbearably arrogant and not a fun person to be around most of the time, because I was just so superior and very judgmental. I didn't have any time for anything that didn't fit into my pattern or scheme of things.

GW Before that time, you'd actually played with Muddy Waters. How did that come about?

CLAPTON I think Mike Vernon [*the producer of* Blues Breakers with Eric Clapton] put the whole thing together. He got Muddy in the studio, and all I can remember is just being incredibly scared, clumsy and overwhelmed, you know? Completely overwhelmed. At that time, the blues thing was going through some funny changes; if you played electric guitar, you'd sold out. Josh White had done a lot of touring in Europe, and Big Bill Broonzy had, too. Josh would go on and do "Down by the Riverside" and "Scarlet Ribbons" and things; it was very middle-of-the-road blues and folk, and it was all acoustic.

Then Brownie McGhee and Sonny Terry would tour and they made it palatable; they kind of acquainted everyone with the blues via the acoustic guitar, and so I think when Muddy came over the first time, he brought an electric guitar and it wasn't very well received. So he wasn't everybody's cup of tea. It was only the purists who knew about Chicago blues.

GW It must have been an overwhelming thing for you to play with him, since you were only about 20 at the time.

CLAPTON Yeah, if that. I couldn't take it all in. I felt really stupid because I was a little boy trying to play a man's music, and these were *the* men. They were actually just past their prime, so they'd done it; they'd done what I'm *still* trying to do. I felt really clumsy. I thought I didn't really belong, but I felt very grateful for the opportunity.

GW Everybody assumes you were with the Yardbirds a long time or that you were with the Bluesbreakers a long time, but in actual fact it was a matter of months in both cases.

CLAPTON Yes, I went through all those things very quickly. I mean, Cream was like a year and a half or something, and even with John Mayall, I was only half there. I was *so* unreliable, so irresponsible. I would sometimes just not show up at gigs, and that's how Peter Green would be asked to play—because I was not there. I went to see John last year to actually make amends. I'd been looking back and realized how badly I'd behaved.

GW How does Cream fit into your perspective now? It must have been a very intense 19 months.

CLAPTON It was *very* intense; it actually seems like we were together for three or four years, but in fact it was very short. I think my overall feeling about it now is that it was a glorious mistake. I had a completely different idea of what it would be before I started it, and it ended up being a wonderful thing, but nothing like it

> "I WAS ON SOME KIND OF MISSION, SO IN A WAY I THOUGHT, YES, I AM GOD; QUITE RIGHT."

RIGHT WITH HIS GRANDMOTHER ROSE CLAP IN HER HOME; OPPOSITE ONSTAGE IN 1975.

OPPOSITE PAGE: STEVE MORLEY/RETNA; THIS PAGE: JOHN OLSON/GETTY IMAGES

ABOVE WITH ALBERT KING, B.B. KING AND STEVIE RAY VAUGHAN FOR A 1987 TV SPECIAL; BELOW WITH LUCIANO PAVAROTTI, 1996

was meant to be.

GW It was meant to be your band, wasn't it?

CLAPTON It was meant to be a blues trio. I just didn't have the assertiveness to take control. Jack [*Bruce*] and Ginger [*Baker*] were the powerful, dominant personalities in the band; they sort of ran the show and I just played. I just went with the flow in the end and I enjoyed it greatly, but it wasn't anything like I expected it to be at all.

GW In the Cream period, you virtually ran the gamut of Gibsons. You played a Firebird, a 335, Les Pauls, the very famous psychedelic SG. Were there any particular favorites? Apparently, you've still got your 335.

CLAPTON Still got that 335, and I love it. I still get it out every now and then. The 335 was a big favorite, and that particular Firebird—I had some great times on that. The single pickup was a fantastic sound. I think that SG went through the Cream thing just about the longest. It was really a very, very powerful and comfortable instrument because of its lightness and the width and the flatness of the neck. It had a lot going for it—it had the humbuckers; it had everything I wanted at that point.

GW You've played as a guest on many different albums, but the most unusual must be your contribution to Frank Zappa's *We're Only in It for the Money*.

CLAPTON Yeah, we were pals. It started when I went to New York with the Cream and the Who to do the Murray the K show [*Murray the K was a famous New York City disc jockey during the Sixties*]. We used to go down to the Village to find out what was going on; there were the Fugs and the Mothers [*of Invention, Zappa's band*], and you'd be able to go into the Café Au Go Go and see B.B. King play and just everything. New York was unbelieveable. The Mothers were at the Garrick Theater, and there would be nobody in the audience—*nobody!* They were experimenting every night; they'd have odd people, bag ladies and marines, on the stage, and Frank would come off and sit in the audience and talk to someone while the band played. It was madness! He took me home one night to his house and he made me play into a Revox [*tape recorder*] and told me to play all the licks I knew. I thought it was really sweet, and I didn't mind doing it. I was just really flattered

COURTESY OF EVERETT COLLECTION

RIGHT WITH JIMI HENDRIX

that he was interested, because it was clear this was a musical intellectual I was meeting.

He was very manipulative and knew how to appeal to my ego and my vanity, and I put everything on this tape. I think he just had files and files of tapes of people, and I was in there somewhere. When I went back I called him up and he invited me to the studio. He'd already had someone inside a piano talking—he'd climbed inside the piano—and he said, "I want you to pretend to be Eric Burdon [*the Animals' lead singer*] on acid." And that's what I did. I was just saying, "I can see God," and all this stuff, and it was funny to be involved with these people. I felt like I was being incredibly hip and fashionable... God, I had some funny times with Frank.

Another time I went to L.A., and I knew he was having a party, so I went 'round to his house and someone opened the door and put a guitar in my hands. It was already plugged in, like they'd been tipped off that I was coming, and I walked straight into this trap. Another time, I went to see him in concert, and he invited me to play. When I went out to do my solo, he did that famous thing of doing hand signals to the band, and they went through about 10 different time signatures and fucked me up completely! I couldn't make head or tail of it.

GW Looking back now, are you able to put your history into context objectively? Are you able to look back at the player you were then and actually think, Yeah, that was okay, or, That was a bit shaky?

CLAPTON Yes, fairly. I think all of it was okay until drugs and drink got involved. I don't think my facility as a player has really gotten much better or worse. I mean, I just finished doing a blues in there, a Freddie King song, and it doesn't sound that much stiffer or that much faster than when I was with John Mayall or Cream—a bit more fluent, a bit more confident maybe. But what's clear to me is that then I was much more in touch with the actual making of music, as I am again now. There was this long bit in between where I was more inclined to just get out of it. At some point toward the end of the Sixties and all the way through the Seventies, I was *out*, you know? I was on holiday, and being a musician was my way of making the money to *be* on holiday.

GW That whole thing started with Jimi Hendrix's death, in a way. The dates are almost coincidental, aren't they?

CLAPTON Yeah. It was funny how that all picked up. The Sixties were great and we were all doing drugs recreationally. We were all under the impression that we could take it or leave it. It was more like weekend binging: you'd do whatever you were doing, and then you'd get stoned one night or you'd take acid, and then you wouldn't do it again for a while. Then it got to the point where those of us who were addicts by nature just carried on doing it, and we'd do it all the time.

I think we lost the thread then, but—and I suppose this may be a bit presumptuous—it kind of opened the door for punk, because there was no continuity from the musical pattern that evolved in the Sixties. It kind of got scrambled and lost with all the drugs and opened the door for all the anarchy, bitterness and anger. The musicians of the Seventies didn't really have a very clear legacy. The legacy got very fucked and very self-indulgent. I think that the whole thing about the Sex Pistols was that there were really pissed off at our indulgence—the indulgence and that self-righteous stance of the Sixties.

GW Jimi actually jammed with Cream, didn't he?

CLAPTON Yes. First time I ever met him, we were playing at the Central London Polytechnic, and Jimi came along with [*his manager*] Chas Chandler. I don't know how long he'd been in England, maybe a couple of days, but he got up and played. He was doing Howlin' Wolf songs, and I couldn't believe this guy. I couldn't believe it. Part of me wanted to run away and say, "Oh, now this is what *I* want to be—I can't handle this." And part of me just fell in love. It was a really difficult thing for me to deal with, but I just had to surrender and say, "This is fantastic."

GW You became good friends, didn't you?

CLAPTON Oh yeah, instantly, instantly.

GW I don't think people realize how much of a blues player Hendrix was. In a lot of ways it's obvious now, but in those days it didn't seem to come into it.

CLAPTON No, I know. I think a lot of people thought, Oh yeah,

"IF PEOPLE TALKED TO ME ABOUT HENDRIX, I WOULD JUST TURN AWAY; I FELT LIKE THEY WERE TALKING ABOUT AN EX-GIRLFRIEND OR A BROTHER WHO HAD DIED."

LIPO MUSTO/REX USA

ABOVE WITH CHUCK BERRY AND KEITH RICHARDS DURING THE FILMING OF THE 1986 DOCUMENTARY *HAIL! HAIL! ROCK 'N' ROLL*

TERRY O'NEILL/GETTY IMAGES

the Band of Gypsys thing was the best. Or they look at different eras of his music making in terms of his "peak" or his "most prolific" or his "most creative" periods. But the core of all his playing was blues, and what really used to upset him the most was that he got this fixation about selling out. He got very down on himself and very cynical about his acceptance. He thought he was going commercial all the time, and yet he couldn't stop himself, in a way.

GW You've recorded Jimi's "Stone Free" and "Little Wing" in the past. Why haven't you recorded more of his songs, seeing as you were so close?

CLAPTON I got very jealous of Jimi. I was very possessive about him when he was alive, and when he died I was very angry and got even more possessive. If people talked to me about Hendrix, I would just turn away; I wasn't interested in their perception of Hendrix because I felt like they were talking about an ex-girlfriend or a brother who had died. I just thought, I'm not talking to you about it; I knew him and he was very dear to me, and it's very painful to hear you talk about him as if you knew him—you fucking didn't!

I didn't want anything to do with it. It's taken me all of this time to heal. I don't know how long the grieving process is, but in my experience, it's a fucking long time. It's taken me this long to be able to pick up a guitar and play a Hendrix song.

GW Why did you choose to record "Stone Free" for the 1993 Hendrix tribute album, *Stone Free*?

CLAPTON Well, the thing with "Stone Free" is that when Jimi first played it to me, he told me that it was the one he wanted as the A-side instead of "Hey Joe." To me, it was better than "Hey Joe." When I heard "Stone Free," it blew my fucking mind! And I thought, They're going to put "Hey Joe" out because it's commercial, but he wanted "Stone Free." And it was the first recorded thing that I'd heard of his, and so that was the connection to our friendship.

GW Was your switching to Strats around the time of Jimi's death a conscious tribute to him on your part?

CLAPTON Yes, I think it was. Once he wasn't there any more, I felt like there was room to pick it up. Then I saw Steve Winwood playing one, and something about that really did it for me. I'd always worshipped Steve, and whenever he made a move, I would be right on it. I gave great weight to his decisions, because to me he was one of the few people in England who had his finger on some kind of universal musical pulse. I went to see him at the Marquee, and he was playing a white-necked Strat, and there was something about it...

GW When did you start playing slide?

CLAPTON I've always played slide—not electric—but I played slide when I was playing acoustic in the pubs. I tried to play like Furry Lewis and the more primitive rural blues musicians, and

I also tried to be a little bit like Muddy. Then it sort of went to one side, but it's always come and gone; I've never really stuck very hard at it. I do love it, but somehow or another it doesn't have the madness. When I got into Buddy Guy, there was something about the madness of his playing that I fell in love with. It was like someone jabbing you with their forefinger. It was the staccato madness of it, which you can't do on slide.

GW Was Duane Allman an influence on your slide playing?

CLAPTON Yes, very much so.

GW The story of your meeting has it that you just went to see him in concert.

CLAPTON Well, we'd started the Derek and the Dominos album and we hadn't really got very far. I'd written some songs and we had played gigs—some touring in England—and we'd got a kind of persona. But in the studio, it was very one-dimensional, and it didn't feel like we were getting anywhere. There was a bit of frustration in the air. [*Producer*] Tom Dowd has always been a very clever mixer of people; he's always been a great one for being a catalyst and putting different combinations of musicians together to get an effect. I don't know whether he saw an end result or not, but I think he just wanted me to see Duane. In fact, I'd been talking about Duane, because I'd heard him play on Wilson Pickett's recording of "Hey Jude," and I kept asking people who he was. So Tom took me and all the rest of the Dominos to see the Allman Brothers play in Coconut Grove and introduced us.

I said, "Let's hang out. Come back to the studio." I wanted Duane to hear what we'd done. We just jammed and hung out, got drunk and did a few drugs. He just came in the studio and I kept him there! I kept thinking up ways to keep him in the room: "We could do this. Do you know this one?" Of course he knew *everything* that I would say, and we'd just do it. A lot of those things, like "Key to the Highway" or "Nobody Knows You When You're Down and Out" are first or second takes. Then I'd quickly think of something else to keep him there. I knew that sooner or later he was going to go back to the Allmans, but I wanted to steal him! I tried, and he actually came on a few gigs, too. But then he had to say, almost like a woman, "Well, you know, I am actually married to this band and I can't stay with you." I was really quite heartbroken! I'd got really used to him, and after that I felt like I had to have another guitar player. I had Neal Schon come in for a little while, having met him through Carlos Santana, but by that time we were getting really fucked up and the band was on its way out.

GW That was the beginning of your dark period, wasn't it?

CLAPTON I don't know whether it can be fairly placed at the door of drugs or relationships or life issues as much as I just had to get away. I had been doing so much. I'd been out there for a long time, playing and playing, with no break. I do that a lot; I work quite hard—I always have. And at that point, for some reason, a combination of things put me into a kind of retirement that I needed.

I remember at the end of that period that I was starting to fall back in love with music. I remember listening to music very hard and wanting to play very much, but I had to get off the scene to get that enthusiasm back. Because I'd lost it.

Derek and the Dominos were recording in here when we broke up and I went into that dark place. I didn't give a shit about the music anymore. We'd come in and just argue all day and have a go at one another, and then one of us would blow up and split. The music didn't matter. I didn't like the sound of my guitar, I didn't like the way I played, and it took me a while to go away and come back to it. When I came back, it was with a different point of view, a fresh enthusiasm and a kind of open-mindedness to learn about new music, because that's when I heard reggae. I was just like a kid in a sweet shop again.

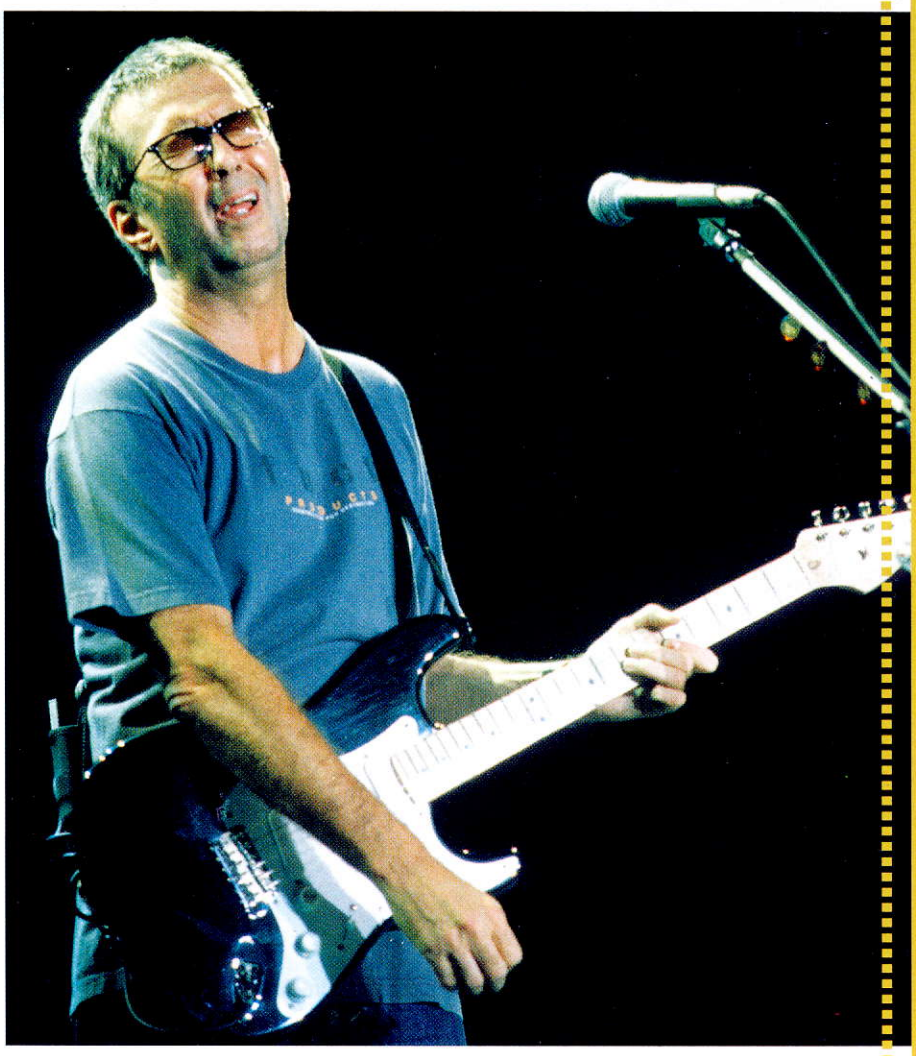
GW You toured a hell of a lot throughout the Seventies.

CLAPTON Toured and recorded and got out of it! I had a great time, but it was all fairly directionless. I mean, I don't regret any of it, to be honest; I think there was no other way for me to go, in a way. I'm just very grateful that I survived it and didn't die, because I was often in some very seriously dangerous situations with booze and drugs. I used to do crazy things that people would bail me out of, where I was risking life and limb in cars or in different life-threatening situations. And I'm just grateful that I survived. But the music got very lost; I didn't know where I was going and I didn't really care. I was more into just having a good time, and I think it showed. I think I got fairly irresponsible, and there were some people that liked it and other people that got very pissed off.

And my guitar playing took a back seat. I'd gotten fed up with that thing about "The Legend"—I wanted to be something else and I wasn't really sure what that was. I was just latching onto people and trying to be like them, to see if something else would emerge. And all that *did* emerge, in the long run, is what I am now. I don't really know what that is as a definition except it's more in tune with what I was at the beginning—which is a blues musician.

GW It has been said of those days that nobody could actually predict what any given Eric Clapton concert was going to be like.

CLAPTON It would depend very much on who I'd bumped into that day—who had managed to corner my attention—because then I'd just go off with them. I was just like a grass in the wind: I went anywhere. I was literally anybody's, depending on what they were holding—you know, what drug or what drink they were on. Then there'd be the gig in the evening, and I'd be wherever that was, wherever I'd been taken.



TERRY O'NEILL/GETTY IMAGES

GW That period ended dramatically around 1984-1985. Suddenly, there were projects like *Edge of Darkness* and the Roger Waters album *The Pros and Cons of Hitch Hiking*, which saw you playing with much more fire and power. But it was probably Live Aid that was responsible for reestablishing you in many people's minds. Did the reaction you received surprise you?

CLAPTON Yeah! I'm not sure I was even able to take it all in. I've always been a very, very self-effacing or low-self-worth sort of person. When they told me where I was going to be on the bill, I didn't get it. I thought, What? Really? And that really did a lot for me. And that reception—it was

BELOW AT THE SAN BERNADINO SWING AUDITORIUM, CIRCA 1977

mind blowing! From that point on, I stared to give myself a bit more of a pat on the back and to be kind to myself.

GW Did the multiple Grammys for *Unplugged* take you by surprise?

CLAPTON Yeah, I must admit I found it all a bit overblown. I mean, I thought the album was quite rough, to say the least. I think most of the recognition and applause was wrapped up in another gesture—which is beautiful and I don't want to put that down at all. I appreciate all of it, but I felt it was all a little bit blown out of proportion. And frightening. If I'd taken it too seriously, it could have done me in.

GW There have been lots of books written about you. What do you think of them?

CLAPTON I think they all take it far too seriously. It's a bit like the "Clapton is God" thing; they all follow on from that. *Survivor* [*Ray Coleman's 1993 authorized biography*] has got a hint of that. It's all a bit reverent, isn't it? I don't really see myself as being that heroic. I was just lucky to be in the right place at the right time and very fortunate to have survived. So I am a survivor, but it all ought to be taken a little less seriously, I feel.

I think if it's due to anything, it's just the fact that I'm fairly honest about what I do. I just try to do the best and carry on working, and do it as simply and unaffectedly as possible. I'm not bullshitting people: all I really want to do is to play with dignity and self-respect. I'm making a blues album because things have come full circle. It's been 30 years and I'm doing what I've always wanted to do. I'm fulfilling myself for other people too, because I've always been badgered about this. People are always saying, "When are you going to do this blues album that you're always on about?" And I'm doing it! It then frees me up, opens the door for whatever's next, and it will be interesting to see what that is going to be,

> "DEREK AND THE DOMINOS WERE RECORDING IN HERE WHEN WE BROKE UP AND I WENT INTO THAT DARK PLACE. I DIDN'T GIVE A SHIT ABOUT THE MUSIC ANYMORE."

GW At the Albert Hall this year, not only were you using a Les Paul again, you were playing a great many vintage Gibsons. Are you using them on the blues album?

CLAPTON Yeah. This album is paying respect to the records the way I heard and felt about them, as much as possible. And so, when I'm singing and playing, I'm trying to be me being Freddie King. Of course, that doesn't happen, because it still comes out as me, but I'm doing it as much as I can: in the way we record it, for instance, all on the floor at the same time; with the instruments I play and the way I sing it—everything to try and be as true to my recollection of the experience as possible. Not that I want to copy the original record that closely, but the *experience*—the emotional way it felt to me.

GW Singing "Tears in Heaven" and "The Circus Left Town" must be extremely difficult for you.

CLAPTON It's been close on occasions where I could choke and not be able to do it, but then what would happen? We'd have to stop

NEIL ZLOZOWER

ABOVE AT A JAM SESSION HOSTED BY CARL PERKINS (LEFT), GUESTS INCLUDE FORMER BEATLES GEORGE HARRISON AND RINGO STARR (THIRD AND SEVENTH FROM LEFT, RESPECTIVELY), IN LONDON, OCTOBER 23, 1985

DAVE HOGAN/HULTON ARCHIVE/GETTY IMAGES

and it would get mawkish and embarrassing. At the same time, to back off and pretend that it's about nothing and just play it as if it was a song that had no meaning would be pointless, so there's a thin line you have to tread, somewhere in the middle. It does require a fair amount of discipline, concentration and focus to stay in the right place and not step off the tightrope either way.

GW Are you going to record "The Circus Left Town"?

CLAPTON Yeah. I wanted to talk to the record company about recording another album alongside this one and putting it out as a double album, but at the moment it seems that they're not in agreement. It's not just "The Circus Left Town"; there's another one that I wrote about my son called "My Father's Eyes," which was part of the *Unplugged* program but didn't get in there. There are a handful of songs that are in that mold, and some other stuff, too, which is more rock and roll, so that will be on perhaps the next studio rock album, if that's what's going to happen. But at the moment, all I can see is this blues thing and being true to that.

GW How did you go about choosing the track for this record?

CLAPTON Well, they're just the songs that I've always loved out of my record collection: blues masterpieces that have had some kind of profound effect on me, like the Jimmy Rogers song "Blues All Day Long." There's something about that: the balance of the instruments and the way it's recorded. The beauty and the strength of it have always taken my breath away and always will. I don't do it quite the same way, but what I'm trying to recreate is the emotional experience that I got when I heard it. There was something about all of those songs that took me to some beautiful place and made me feel better or gave me cold chills when I heard them, so I'd try to make that happen again by playing them.

GW Do you think there are any modern blues songs written today which do the same kind of thing?

CLAPTON Yeah, oh yeah. In fact, I would like to do a couple of Robert Cray's songs. He's the last of the great heroes, I think. A great singer, writer and player, too.

GW Have you got any advice for today's guitar players?

CLAPTON Listen to the past. I've run into a lot of players in the past 10 or 15 years who didn't really know where it was coming from. They thought it came from Jimmy Page or Jeff Beck, or they thought it came from Buddy Guy or B.B. King. Well, it comes from further back, and if you go back and listen to Robert Johnson and Blind Blake and Blind Boy Fuller and Blind Willie Johnson and Blind Willie McTell, there's thousands of them that all have something that led to where it is now. The beauty of it is that you can take one of those things and make it *yours*. But by learning too much from the later players, you don't have that much opportunity to make something original. I listened to [*New Orleans trumpet player*] King Oliver, Louis Armstrong, Jelly Roll Morton, Thelonious Monk, Charles Mingus, John Coltrane and Archie Shepp. I listened to everything I could that came from that place that they call "the blues" but in form isn't necessarily the blues.

GW A lot of those guys are jazz players.

CLAPTON They are, but they all would acknowledge that if you can't play the blues, you can't play jazz anyway. So, listen, listen, listen, and go back as far as you dare. That's what I still do today. I still listen to Leroy Carr and Scrapper Blackwell for their beauty and simplicity and to get a feeling, because that's what it's about. It's not about technique, it's not about what kind of instrument you play or how many strings it's got or how fast you can play or how loud or quiet it is; it's about how it feels and how it makes you feel when you play.

GW Finally, you once said you had two ambitions in life: one was to play one note in a blues solo that could bring an audience to the verge of tears, and the other was to sleep with 10,000 women. Have you...

CLAPTON No—and I haven't slept with 10,000 women either. Still got both of them to do...if I live that long. GL

NEAL PRESTON/CORBIS

THE ARTIST

FORMERLY KNOWN AS

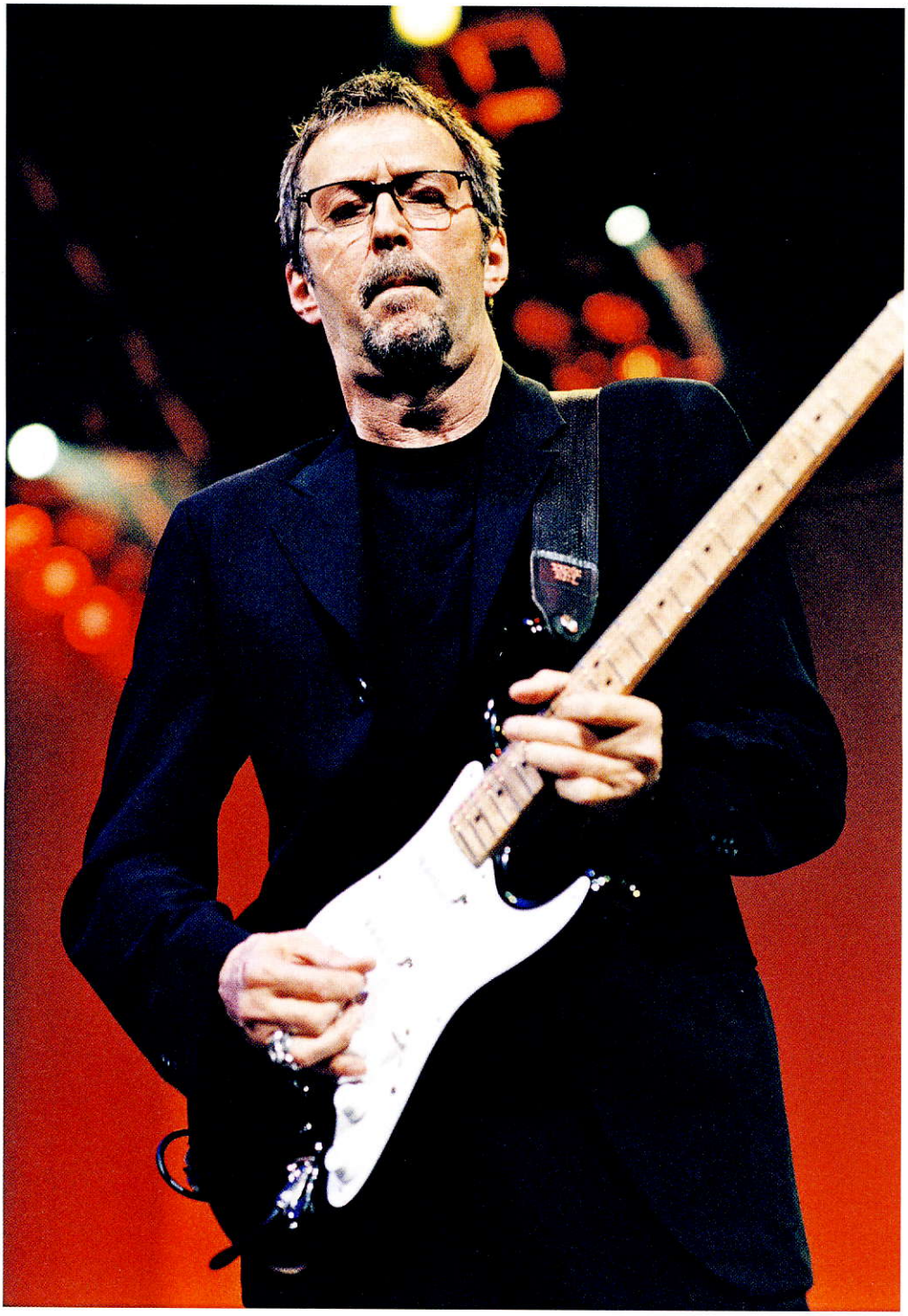
GOD

On *Pilgrim*, ERIC CLAPTON demonstrated that there's more to salvation than a heavenly guitar solo.

BY BRAD TOLINSKI AND HAROLD STEINBLATT

Reprinted from Guitar World, *May 1998*

IT WAS IN the early Sixties that Eric Clapton first grabbed people with the scream in his sound. People called it the "woman tone," but that was no woman—that was his life. On songs like "Born Under a Bad Sign" and "Crossroads," he used his guitar to give voice to the emotions he couldn't, or wouldn't, vent as a singer or songwriter.



That changed with *Pilgrim*. Released in 1998, it was Clapton's first full album of new material in more than eight years. Compared to much of Clapton's past work, *Pilgrim* found him standing up to some powerful ghosts: Stevie Ray Vaughan, with whom he was touring at the time of the guitarist's death, in 1989; Clapton's four-year-old son Conor, who died in 1991 and was the inspiration for Clapton's 1992 hit "Tears in Heaven"; and his own father, whom Clapton had never known and whose absence informs the *Pilgrim* track "My Father's Eyes." " 'My Father's Eyes' is very personal," said Clapton. "I realized that the closest I ever came to looking in my father's eyes was when I looked into my son's eyes."

And, unlike in the past, he did not rely on his guitar playing alone to do the dirty work. On *Pilgrim*, Clapton rose to the challenge posed by his uncommonly revealing lyrics by taking some uncommon risks vocally. From the raucous bluesy shouting of "Sick and Tired" to the technically demanding ornamentation of "Broken Hearted," he sang the album's tracks with the same controlled abandon once associated only with his guitar playing.

GUITAR WORLD What significance does your album's title, *Pilgrim*, hold for you?

ERIC CLAPTON I think everybody has their own way of looking at their lives as some kind of pilgrimage. Some people will see their role as a pilgrim in terms of setting up a fine family, or establishing a business inheritance. Everyone's got their own definition. Mine, I suppose, is to know myself. That's probably as close as I can get to it. My goal is to really come to identify who I am to myself.

GW The album represents a breakthrough for you in terms of songwriting: you wrote 12 of its 14 songs. It's been almost a decade since you've even come close to being this prolific. Was composing

KEN SETTLE

ABOVE WITH BOB DYLAN AT THE CROSSROADS BENEFIT, MADISON SQUARE GARDEN, JUNE 30, 1999

KEVIN MAZUR/WIREIMAGE.COM

the songs on this album important to your process of self-discovery?

CLAPTON Absolutely. As you've observed, my normal output is usually much less than this. Actually, that used to be the way I wanted it. I would always want no more than two or three of my songs on an album because I just didn't want to reveal myself.

It wasn't cowardice. Or maybe it was. Maybe it was a mixture of cowardice and insecurity, or just low self-esteem. In the past I would think, What have I got to say that's any better than, say, [*songwriter*] Jerry Williams? or whoever else was contributing songs to my albums. But on *Pilgrim*, I started developing a really healthy respect for my own talent.

GW Who or what was responsible for this dramatic change?

CLAPTON It was primarily due to working with [*keyboardist and* Pilgrim *co-producer*] Simon Climie, who was very encouraging and very supportive. I could always rely on him to be an objective sounding board. He gave me confidence, and then once he brought it out there was no stopping me. I could've carried on writing, but we'd actually ended up with more than we needed. We went in with virtually nothing, so the great thing was that it evolved and got written as we went along.

GW In the past, you've been content to let your guitar do the talking. I get the feeling that, these days, that just isn't enough for you, that you want to take the same kinds of chances with your songwriting and singing that are usually associated with your playing.

CLAPTON You're right. I originally set a wide-open boundary on this record, and once I knew that I'd stepped over the time limit, I thought, Now that we've taken this chance, we might as well go for broke and just get everything as far out as possible.

I just feel like I've become a little more whole in terms of how I see myself as a singer-songwriter-musician. There is a better balance now among the components than there was before. I remember when I thought of singing as the bit that went between the guitar playing—something I couldn't wait to get out of the way. Singing was originally like a chore that I didn't really enjoy. Now all of the components are completely integrated, equally important and really dependent on one another. I now enjoy singing as much as the guitar playing, if not more sometimes.

> "I WANTED TO BRING PEOPLE BACK FROM LABELING ME OR TRYING TO PIGEONHOLE ME, OR GETTING IT WRONG."

GW And the lyrics, too, I imagine.

CLAPTON Absolutely. The writing, too.

GW This is going to sound a tad pretentious, but would you say that the artist has an obligation to reveal himself—to bare his soul?

CLAPTON I can only speak for myself, but I believe it is my responsibility to do so. But to do so with care, as well.

GW Responsibility to whom? To yourself or to your audience?

CLAPTON To myself, and to the nature of the human race, really. I feel a real need to observe a level of propriety in what I'm handing out. Instead of me just venting or spilling my guts, I've got to consider how it's going to affect people. How it's going to affect me, as well, because it's like a cycle.

I've kind of learned to embrace that responsibility, and it makes me work harder. Instead of just chucking out the first thing that comes to mind or the first

ABOVE WITH ROBERT CRAY, STEVIE RAY VAUGHAN AND JIMMIE VAUGHAN, ALPINE VALLEY WISCONSIN, AUGUST 26, 1990

thing I feel, I really examine it much more now and go over it and think about cause and effect.

GW Is the process joyful or painful?

CLAPTON Joyful, but in an odd way. When I first conceived this album, I told anybody who was going to get involved that my goal was to make the saddest record that's ever been made. It was like, "Are you with me, man and boy?" A couple of people responded by looking at me like I was insane, that this was not a good ambition. [*laughs*]

The first person who totally understood where I was coming from was [*noted session drummer*] Steve Gadd, who said, "Yes! I get the point!" He understood that what I was trying to do was set something up that I could enjoy, because my enlightenment has come from true sadness. When I hear very sad records, I don't get depressed. I feel an affinity and I feel relief. The first thing I get is a sense of, I am not alone. Thank God! I'm not alone.

GW How difficult was it to take previously private feelings about specific tragedies in your life and express them artistically?

CLAPTON It was difficult. For instance, the first draft of "My Father's Eyes" came out sounding pretty petulant. The lyrics were too angry and childish. Where the art and craft came in was in being able to shape the anger into something people could empathize with. It wouldn't work for me to just kind of sulk in the song, because it wouldn't have communicated. Instead of feeling an affinity, people would've been repelled.

So I felt the way to make "My Father's Eyes" into a sharing experience was to give it dignity, so that it would make it easy for someone else to identify with. That's where the craft comes in. It's learning how to use the power of your emotions, but figuring out how to present it in a way that makes it okay for someone else to take that onboard as being their message.

"My Father's Eyes" was the hardest song to record on the album. It was one of the first songs, along with "Circus," that I wrote after my son died. And it was the last one that I could let go of. In fact, I found "Circus" a lot easier to let go of. "My Father's Eyes" went through five incarnations in the making of this record, and I would veto it each time and say each wasn't good enough.

In retrospect, I question what I was up to, because at the time it was purely from an artistic point of view that I said, "it's too fast," or "it's too jolly," or "it's too sad." Now, I actually think subconsciously I just wasn't ready to let it go, because it meant, on some level, letting go of my son.

GW Did writing and recording "My Father's Eyes" and "Circus" help you cope with the loss of your child?

CLAPTON Music was very important. Talking about it with friends and seeking professional help were also crucial. Confronting it head-on was the best thing for me. It was very important that I be responsible, because there were others besides myself who needed comfort.

GW "River of Tears" is perhaps one of the most passionate vocal performances of your career. Given the personal nature of this album, can we assume that it, too, is autobiographical?

CLAPTON "River of Tears" was recorded very early in the *Pilgrim* sessions, and I can remember thinking, This is as good as anything I've ever heard myself do. In fact, it became the standard for the rest of the album. I didn't want anything else to fall below that.

ROBERT KNIGHT

Lyrically, it is about a specific person. My impulse for writing the song was initially very manipulative. I was always toying with the idea that when she'd hear this song there would be a reconciliation or something. It had a purpose.

And then it started getting vindictive. It got quite vindictive in some of its early stages, and at some point I started feeling like the lyrics were becoming too melodramatic. I realized that the way to save it was to bring it back to talking about me, and that maybe *I'm* an unavailable person—maybe it's *me* that's unavailable. That whole thing in the song about just drifting from town to town and not really being able to fit in takes the blame off somebody else and places it on myself.

GW Your ability to question your own motives sounds like a therapist's dream come true. How did you sustain such honesty on the album?

CLAPTON Working with a partner makes that possible—especially if it's someone who knows what you're up to. If Simon thought I was being dishonest with my lyrics, he would call me out and say, "I think this is unfair," and I'd listen and address it. On that level, our partnership is as fruitful as anything I've ever experienced.

GW Your guitar playing is somewhat subdued on this album, but one track where you really let it rip is "Sick and Tired." The song is built on a Texas-style shuffle rhythm, à la Stevie Ray Vaughan, and the vocal and solo are very much in the style of Jimmie Vaughan. Is this a tribute to the brothers?

CLAPTON "Sick and Tired" was done purely for fun. The riff came first, and I just thought of the Vaughan brothers. I told Simon to program a shuffle and exaggerate the backbeat so it would sound like a Texas-style groove. I then began improvising these silly lyrics, and thought, "Well, I might as well make it a song now." It's like a spoof, really.

GW I'm not sure how you may take this, but we thought the vocals and playing on "Sick and Tired" sound more impassioned than any performance on your blues tribute, *From the Cradle* [*Reprise, 1994*].

CLAPTON Funnily enough, I think that the bit of irony in there gave me the license to carry the anger of the vocal. I remember going into the studio and singing that with a lot of anger. Quite hard. But since there was irony in the lyrics, that made it okay. It didn't get overindulgent.

GW You weren't operating under the pressure of making a grand blues "statement," as you possibly were when you recorded *From the Cradle*.

CLAPTON Exactly.

GW Are you particularly close to Jimmie Vaughan?

CLAPTON I've known Jimmie for a pretty long time. And then with the passing of his brother, Stevie, Jimmie and I kind of bonded on a very deep level. We don't talk enough, and a lot of the time it's my fault, but when we get together I love him. He's as close as I'll get to having a brother. And I think the world of his playing. And his singing—his singing is great!

GW What did you think of Stevie's playing?

CLAPTON Oh, he was one of the greats. I have to tell this story: We played on the same bill on his last two gigs. On the first night, I watched his set for about half an hour, and then I had to leave because I couldn't handle it. I was going to go on after this guy, and I just couldn't handle it! I knew enough to know that his playing was just going to get better and better and better. His set had started, he was like two or three songs in, and I suddenly got that flash that I'd seen before so many times whenever I'd seen him play, which was that he was like a channel—one of the purest channels I've ever seen, where everything he sang and played flowed straight down from heaven. Almost like one of those mystic Sufi guys with one finger pointing up and one finger down. That's what it was like to listen to. And I had to leave just to preserve some kind of sanity or confidence in myself.

GW In addition to paying tribute to your son and the Vaughan brothers, it's clear you had someone else in mind while making this album. On several tracks you pay direct homage to R&B great Curtis Mayfield. Why Curtis?

CLAPTON Well, his last album, *New World Order*, came out the year I was starting to put this album together, and it was a huge inspiration to me. It was great on so many levels.

First, Curtis is older than me, yet he was working in a very hip field. The album was very progressive and featured guys like Organized Noise, a tremendously modern, urban R&B production company. That in itself is pretty cool.

But what really got me was that he had recently been severely crippled in a terrible stage accident and should be suicidal by all accounts, yet here he was singing about joy and gratitude and life. All of those components were an inspiration to me. Whenever I began to question why I was pushing myself so hard on *Pilgrim*, I only had to picture Curtis.

GW Did you go back and listen to his classic albums? Some of the string arrangements on *Pilgrim* seem to be inspired by earlier Curtis Mayfield tracks.

CLAPTON Yeah. That was deliberate.

GW Your vocals on "Pilgrim" and "Inside of Me" are very obviously inspired by Curtis. Were you concerned about doing such a thing?

CLAPTON No, this is outright. To me, it's more heartfelt than just saying, "Thanks, Curtis, for the inspiration," or writing that on the record, as anyone can do. I really wanted to work at making him proud, if I could. I hope that's how this works out.

Now, he could be pissed-off! [*laughs*] Or maybe he could be both—proud and pissed-off at the same time. Who knows? But I could just hear Curtis sing the opening line in "Pilgrim," so I had to do it in his voice. [*sings*] "How do I choose, and where do I draw the line between truth and necessary pain?"

There's something kind of clever and wordy about that opening line, and I just thought, This just sounds like the sort of thing he would sing. And then I looked down and realized it was a good line, but that it didn't really make any sense—it doesn't mean a damn thing! [*laughs*] But it didn't matter.

GW You're right, because it sounds so righteous!

CLAPTON That's the point. As long as it sounds righteous.

GW Do you ever fear that you've crossed the line separating homage and plagiarism?

CLAPTON I think it comes down to motive. I think if my motives, to put it simply, are good, then I would use that as a license to go ahead. If my motive is to say "thank you" to Curtis, which it was, and I hope that he not only hears it but also feels proud that there's someone around who's been that deeply moved that they just want to sing like him, I believe that's good.

But if my motive was, Well, he just had a hit with that sound, now maybe if I imitate him, I'll have a hit, too, that needs some examining.

GW Given your reputation as a blues scholar, part of you must really enjoy being a student.

CLAPTON It's definitely in my nature.

GW Then you've certainly been true to your nature, playing R&B over the last few years. Besides studying the music of Curtis Mayfield, you've worked with Babyface and Tony Rich, both of whom are in the forefront of modern R&B. It sounds to me like you actually took time out to learn something new, a necessary condition for the growth of any artist.

CLAPTON You're absolutely right. Between recording and touring, *From the Cradle* was a three-year project. All I did during that period was play and explore various forms of the blues. And when I stopped, I looked around and discovered that the world had changed at an astonishing rate. I couldn't make sense of anything. I hadn't been listening to the radio, and I had only really been stocking up what I needed to keep this blues thing up in the air.

The only thing I could latch onto was contemporary R&B, because it has its roots in blues. It

"I FELT IT WAS ESSENTIAL THAT PEOPLE STOP THINKING ABOUT ME AS THIS ONE-DIMENSIONAL CHARACTER WHO SHOULD SERIOUSLY CONSIDER PUTTING CREAM BACK TOGETHER AGAIN."

became a safe place for me, hanging on with one hand and poking other things with the other. I became particularly attracted to all the different forms of dance, which still is the dominant music in England at the moment. And I had to do a lot of learning. I also made a lot of choices in the process. It was all about that difficult process of putting your finger on a stove and getting it burned—trying things out.

GW Was it particularly hard for someone of your high visibility to do?

CLAPTON It's certainly hard to do in secret; it's impossible. For example, as an experiment, Simon and I tried to record an album of electronic dance music anonymously, under the name TDF. We felt we had a license to explore because we were going to make music for a fashion show. And even though we were simply trying to stretch, we hit a stone wall. I was roundly criticized in England for sticking my nose in where it didn't belong—experimenting with things like drum and bass. And so I had to back off a lot of that stuff.

GW It strikes me that you were pretty brave. Given your history, it's hard to imagine that you would even stick your toe into that world, let alone your heart and soul. What attracted you to electronica?

CLAPTON Just some of the sounds. And I have to overcome my prejudices all the time. Don't forget, I'm 53 years old, and this stuff is very threatening to me as a musician. It's a bit like I'm one of the old lions, and here come the young guys. It's almost like they would like it if I didn't understand. They would prefer me not to understand because then I'm nothing to worry about. But the thing is, because I've had such a weird and varied experience with music, I can understand it and I can enjoy it.

I remember going into a club in Japan to see a specific drum-and-bass DJ. An English guy who'd had a few drinks came up to me and said, "What are you doing here?" as if to say, "You're not supposed to like this. It's not really cool for you to like this." But the thing is, I do. And if I hear something I like, I want to do it. And I don't understand this divisionist way of thinking: This is our music, that's your music. You stay where you belong and we'll just stay here. For me, cross-pollination has always been the lifeblood of music. And that's what we were trying to do with that TDF thing. Some people liked it. I liked it. And you know, most important, it was the launching pad for this album, because I got to be friendly with using loops and sequences. Actually, I don't know how to program a sequencer, but I got to the point where I wasn't threatened by music technology, which I think is a good thing.

GW Did you use drum loops to help you write some of the songs on this album?

CLAPTON Yeah. It was random. We usually turned to technology when we ran out of things to do and needed a place to start. We would say something like, "Uh, well, um, have you heard the new Usher single?" And from there we'd just copy the drum program, dicker with it, and play along with it. That's how the song "Pilgrim" was born: we came up with a drum program that was derived from a hit—I can't remember which one—we changed it a little, and then I wrote the words. "Needs His Woman," which is a song that I've had for about 10 years, was also built up and developed in this way.

GW While this album represents a departure for you on many levels, you still managed to include one traditional blues song: "Going Down Slow" by St. Louis Jimmie. Just who is this St. Louis Jimmie [*born James Burke Oden*]?

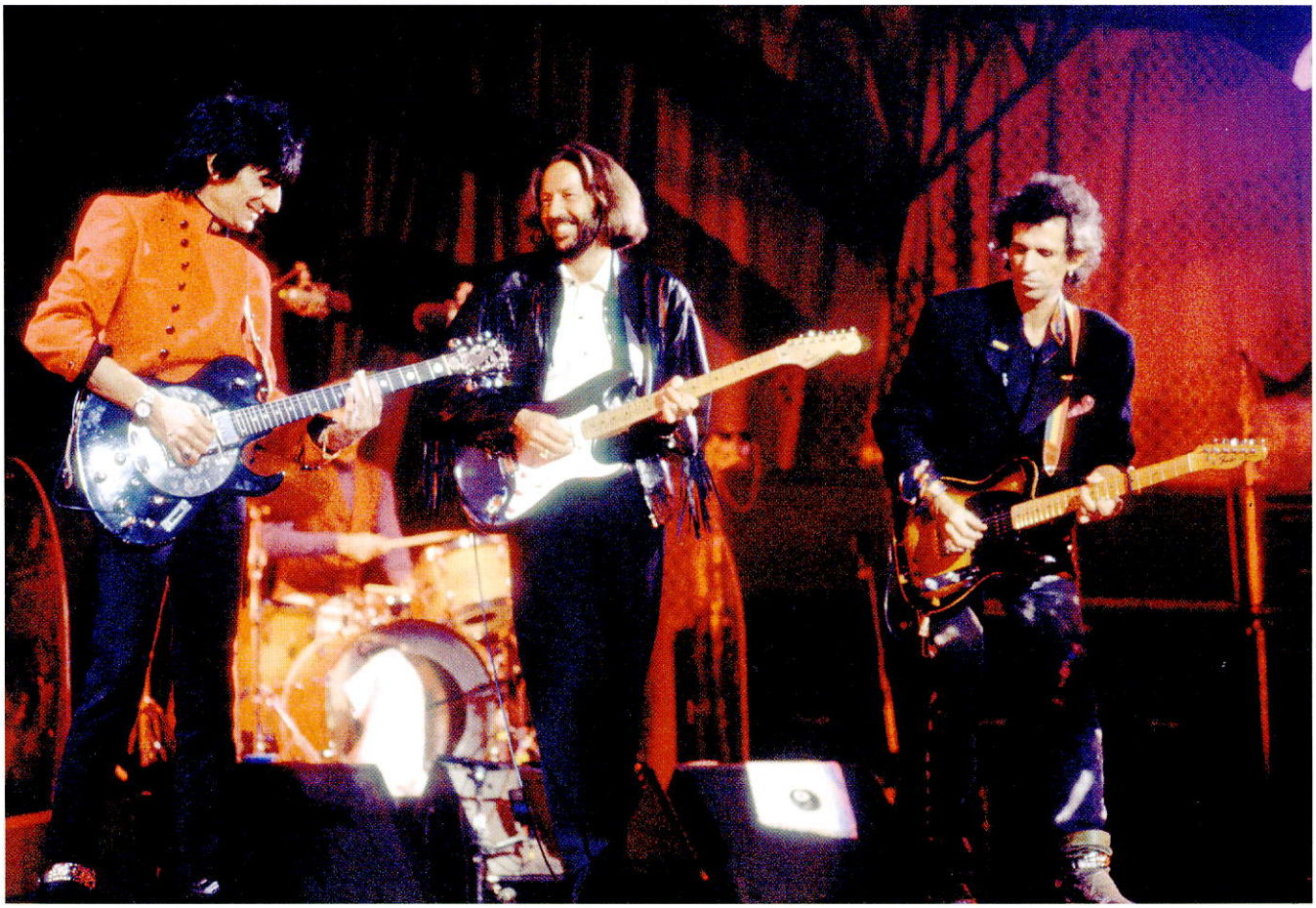
CLAPTON I don't know much about him. I've never seen any photographs of him; I don't even know what else he's written. I've asked B.B. King and Jimmy Rogers about him, and though both knew him, they were sketchy with the details.

In any case, we recorded "Going Down Slow" primarily because I just wanted to include a blues, and that one has always been on my mind.

GW No doubt you've noticed that many important bluesmen, including Luther Allison, Jimmy Rogers and Junior Wells, have died over the past year. What do you think this means for the future of the music?

CLAPTON As long as we have their recorded work, I believe

LEFT AT THE NORDOFF-ROBBINS MUSIC THERAPY CONCERT, NEBWORTH, ENGLAND, 1990; BELOW WITH RON WOOD AND KEITH RICHARDS, IN ATLANTIC CITY, NOVEMBER 27, 1989



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the blues are safe. For example, it could've been possible for me not to have any more experience of the blues than listening to albums by Robert Johnson or Muddy Waters. And even though I've been fortunate enough to have known many of the great bluesmen, I only every now and then, let alone heard them, so his experience was so vastly different from that of musicians today. And his music must have been profoundly affected by that.

GW You heard Robert Johnson when you were only 16 years old,

> **"I SOUGHT MY FATHER IN THE WORLD OF THE BLACK MUSICIAN, BECAUSE IT CONTAINED WISDOM, EXPERIENCE, SADNESS AND LONELINESS."**

secured a faith in the blues even before I knew them personally, through records.

On the other hand, in terms of players coming along from that kind of experience, it's probably the end of the road. There was something about the nature of the way these guys played and the simplicity in their approach that could only have come from a very simple way of life—a way of life that is gone.

Robert Johnson, for example, would've seen another musician and it changed your life. Why do you think you connected so heavily to what was, essentially, an alien, remote music.

CLAPTON I think it has something to do with my not having a father. I sought my father in the world of the black musician, because it contained wisdom, experience, sadness and loneliness. I was not ever interested in the music of boys. From my youngest years, I was interested in the music of men.

GW And the "remote" element?

CLAPTON That would add to the appeal, wouldn't it?

GW In a recent interview, Paul Simon was asked to name one of his contemporaries who still moved him, and he said, "How about Eric Clapton?" He went on to cite your performance on *MTV Unplugged* and how you used that outlet both to explore your musical past and find a direction for your future. Do you agree with that assessment?

CLAPTON When I was first putting that set together, I don't think I had any idea where it would lead me, but I think it's fairly accurate that I saw it as a massive opportunity to set the record straight about who I was and where I'd come from. I felt it was essential that people stop thinking about me as this one-dimensional character who should always just seriously consider getting a hold of Jack Bruce and Ginger Baker and putting Cream back together again.

I always felt that people were saying to me, Stop fucking about, man! Plug into your Marshall 100-watt and let's get the show on the road. And I went, No deal. That's not what I'm about. I started my career playing an acoustic guitar in a pub by myself, and this is how simple it can be, and this is how enjoyable it is on that level. That's what *Unplugged* was about for me.

And it was funny, because I had my band with me, and a lot of the time I had to think of things for them to do. I could have happily just as well done it on my own. And that was important to me to state, not just for the audience at large, but for myself, as well.

GW That you were what? Not a guitar hero but a songwriter?

CLAPTON Or a journeyman. Just someone who really preferred the whole rather than one element. I think I wanted to bring people back from labeling me or trying to pigeonhole me, or getting it wrong. Just simply getting it wrong. GL

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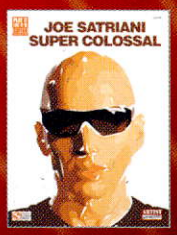

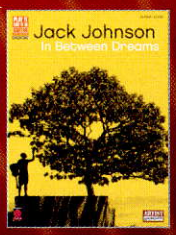

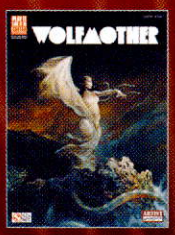

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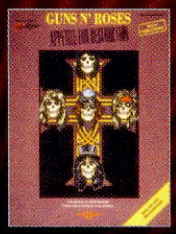

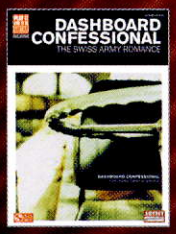

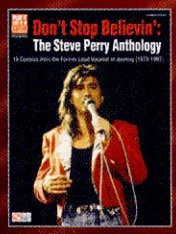

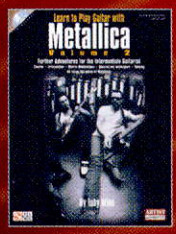

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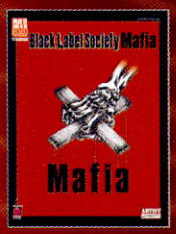

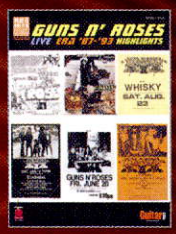

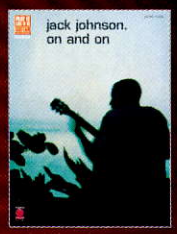

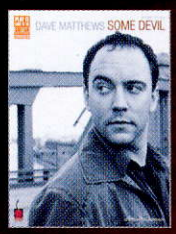

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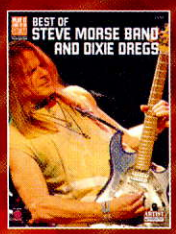

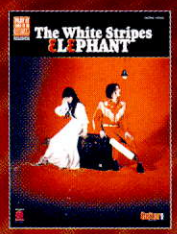

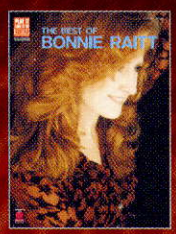

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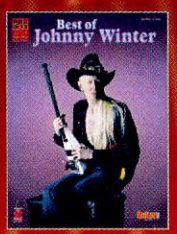

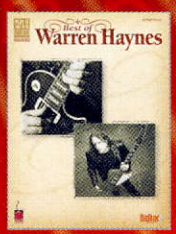

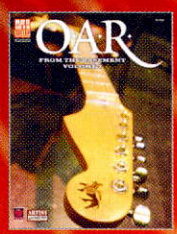

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BY DAN FORTE

Reprinted from Guitar World, *December 1989*

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CLAPTON AND ROBERT CRAY, IN CHICAGO, APRIL 19, 1987

PAUL NATKIN/IMAGE DIRECT

BY THE TIME Eric Clapton encountered the MTV generation in the mid Eighties, his short but profound stints with the Yardbirds, John Mayall's Bluesbreakers, Cream, Blind Faith and Derek and the Dominos seemed a lifetime past. He had become a performer of hits like "Forever Man" and "It's in the Way That You Use It," a composer of soundtracks for *The Color of Money* and *Lethal Weapon* and the man who stole the show at the 1985 Live Aid concert.

The success of 1988's *Crossroads* retrospective box set put his history back into proper perspective. At the time of this interview in late 1989, he had just released *Journeyman*, an album that marked the beginning of his commercial and artistic resurgence. For the album, Clapton was joined by longtime friend George Harrison, but it his work on it with blues guitarist Robert Cray that stood out. Trading solos with Cray on Bo Diddley's "Before You Accuse Me" and playing funky slide licks on Big Mama Thornton's "Hound Dog," Clapton sounded like both student and master, retaining the raw enthusiasm for the blues that he had in his youth while displaying the maturity of a bluesman with more than 25 years under his belt.

GUITAR WORLD Nearly all of the material on *Journeyman* came from outside sources.

ERIC CLAPTON I was really having a difficult time writing, this last year or two. Nothing came until halfway through the sessions. I had a week's rest in England and going back to New York I caught the flu. I knew Robert Cray was going to be in, and suddenly I was faced with the fact that we didn't have anything to do—which is how "Before You Accuse Me" came about. "Let's do that. It's simple and we both know it." That's Crazy [*Cray*] and me intertwining all through the song. He plays the second solo. Then I was in my hotel room just playing around with a riff, and it ended up being "Old Love." Robert wrote the turnaround and the bridge. He takes the first solo and the ride at the end, and I kind of chip in here and there. I wrote "Bad Love" right at the very end, because Warner Bros., as is their wont, came in and said, "Well, where's 'Layla'?" [*laughs*] I methodically thought about it and said, "Well, I'll get a riff, I'll modulate into the verse, and there'll be a chorus where we go into a minor key with a little guitar line. Then there'll be a breakdown and I'll put 'Badge' in for good measure."

GW There are some nice, extremely long bends in the solo.

CLAPTON My fingers suddenly seem stronger than they've ever been. I find that I'm now bending, like, five frets—which is more than I normally do—and holding it. Bending up there and then getting vibrato, which is something I've never been able to do before.

GW There's a lot of wah-wah on this record.

CLAPTON Yeah, I've always liked wah-wah, but I was scared of it for a while, because it became very fashionable in the Philadelphia sound and then sort of burned out. So I thought, Stay clear of this for a bit. I've always liked the Hendrix wah-wah stuff, and I was in the avant-garde of that, too, with "Tales of Brave Ulysses." I bought my wah-wah in Manny's in 1967, and I did "Tales of Brave Ulysses" in New York, I think, the same day—just experimenting with it.

GW What was it like, recording and living in New York while you were working on *Journeyman*?

CLAPTON I was there for three months, and I loved it. I like working in L.A., too, but you seem to get

more done a lot quicker in New York, and the musicians you use there—like Richard Tee and Eddie Martinez—are so quick. Their attitude is so good, and there's not a lot of bullshit. It's just work, work, work. I was generally working till 11 at night and going to bed.

GW Were there other guitarists, besides those already mentioned?

CLAPTON Just George [*Harrison*]. He came in for a week, and we did five of his songs—some of his spare songs and some he'd written especially for the album—and ended up using just one ballad, "Run So Far." It's a [*Traveling*] Wilburys-type thing, because he's very much a Wilbury at the moment. That was the only one of all of his songs that didn't have his augmented chord in it, which drives me crazy. It's lovely when it's with him—you know the one I'm talking about—but when I do it, it's a little bit wrong for me.

GW When we spoke last year, you said that the next album—your first new album since *August*—would probably be more of a straight-ahead rocker. Do you view this album that way, or did you change your mind along the way?

CLAPTON I think it changed a little bit in the making. Pretty early into the sessions we found that the material we were looking for would end up being like rock and roll material. When we did "Hard Times" I said, "This is the kind of album I want to make," and Russ [*Titleman, the album's producer*] said, "Well, let's do that next. Definitely." And I figured, to be fair to Russ, I had to go along with that, because to get him as my producer the first time out and limit him to something is not necessarily very fulfilling for him as a producer. Given the fact that he made that smash hit album for Steve Winwood, I wanted to give him his head, too. As part of our relationship, we kind of agreed that we would postpone a blues album until our next project. So that is concrete.

GW That's been the rumor on the street, but along with it was a rumor that this was going to be your last Warner Bros. album and that you'd get out of that contract in order to do a blues album next time.

CLAPTON The thing was, while we were doing this album and talking about the blues album, I was saying to Russ that I didn't think Warners would validate such a kind of limited-interest thing. He approached [*Warner Bros. president*] Lenny Waronker and told him that that's what we planned to do, and that even if Russ didn't do it for Warners, we'd do it for another label. And, I suppose because he sensed that I would leave the label, Lenny said, "Great idea. I'm all for it." So I stay with Warners and do what I want to do in the meantime. But I think having left a partnership with Phil Collins, it was crucial that they got another fairly commercial album from me first.

GW It's surprising, though, how much control Warner Bros. wields. In 1985 you explained that "Forever Man" and a few others were made—at their behest—after you'd delivered them your original version of *Behind the Sun* [*Clapton's 1985 album*]. In the process they rejected "Heaven Is One Step Away," which is one of the best recent songs in the *Crossroads* box.

CLAPTON Well, in hindsight, it's worked out to everyone's satisfaction. I had a lot of resentment at the time, and I still harbor a little bit, but to be fair I think they're the record company with the greatest access to the people. They have the best distribution and best promotion in the world, so if I want to get my music out, and it's not too much of a hardship to play ball with them, I'm quite happy to do it. And I do like Lenny and Mo [*Ostin*] a lot, because they are producers of music and they know what it's about. And the fact that they did give me a go-ahead for the blues album kind of gave me faith in the relationship again.

GW But if *Eric Clapton* can't go in and give them the album he wants to do without compromises, how would a less proven act fare?

CLAPTON But it was very character building for me to have to face that, and I am grateful for that situation. It lopped a lot off my ego and gave me a little taste of humility, which I may have been in great need of.

GW With this record and *August* [*Clapton's 1986 album*], it sounds as if you've been listening to a lot of soul in the past few years.

CLAPTON I've been listening to a lot of Aretha [*Franklin*]'s early stuff—not out of a plan; just because it happened to be convenient and close at hand. I've actually got in my car that album that I played one track on, *Lady Soul* [*featuring "Good to Me As I Am to You"*], and I listen to that a lot. The way the band is arranged and everything is a great inspiration. There's a great deal of simplicity there, and at the same time it's really very well organized.

GW Even though *Journeyman* has a lot of different feels, including the old-time rock things, "Hound Dog" and "Before You Accuse Me," it doesn't really have a "Rita Mae" or "Ain't Goin' Down"–a full-tilt fast rocker. Was that a conscious decision, or were you not able to come up with one?

CLAPTON It wasn't that we couldn't come up with one; I just wasn't writing that way. Yeah, it would have been nice. The closest you get to that is "Bad Love," and I'm not even sure if *that* isn't too fast. I was kind of staying away from belters, though I don't know why. Until we added a couple of songs, it was very much a mid-range-tempo album—a lot of slow tunes. Maybe I'm mellowing out a bit too much... I don't know.

GW That is an "accusation" that the press has leveled at you as well as Winwood and Phil Collins.

CLAPTON I don't see it, really, because the intensity is there at the same time.

GW Do you think it would be justified if guys who've been around as long as you three choose to just make some nice, catchy tunes?

CLAPTON Yeah, I think that's perfectly justified, but I don't think you could sum up this album like that. When we were cutting tracks and when I sang on them, I was doing it to the utmost of my intensity. If that is mellow, then that's what's happening, you know. That's a natural progression. But it doesn't feel like that to me.

GW The magnitude of *Crossroads* reinforces something you, in certain respects, have tried to downplay: the Clapton-as-bigger-than-life-guitar-hero. Not only in terms of yourself, but in general, how do you view the so-called "guitar hero"? Do you think it's a valid thing, a tasteless exercise...

CLAPTON No, I think it's very admirable, and I think it strengthens a belief that kept me going for years—that you have to have an ideal. And if I have to be a hero, even to myself, it's worth it, because it's something to strive for. I quite like having my mettle tested in that way. I didn't like it not so long ago; I tried to avoid it, to play it down, and tried to *destroy* it. And that process nearly destroyed me, too, as a human being. I found that one went with the other: in order to be a growing human being, you have to keep pushing yourself to the limit. To try to go inward or backward is actually very, very destructive. I find now that I'm actually quite happy to try and perpetuate this myth, even to myself. I mean, I was in Africa this last tour, where I had to fill out all these forms each time we changed countries. And where it said "Occupation," I put "Legend." [*laughs*] I couldn't have done that 10 years ago; I took it all far too seriously.

GW You must be aware that certain critics will inevitably slag you because "this has all been done" and "the days of guitar heroes are over." Does that ever inspire you to go out and say, "I'll show them who's washed up!"

CLAPTON Oh, it does even now. On this record I was determined to make each solo as outside my capabilities as possible, to push myself as far as I could—even if it was just in terms of how many frets you can bend. "Anything for Your Love" has got Robert playing on it, and when I did the solo on that, I looked at him, and he was amazed that I had this one note—I just push it—at the end of a phrase. He was just blown away. So if I can do that to him...

And that really reflects on what I think about critics. I don't think they have much experience to talk from, except for listening. It's my peers that count, and if I get criticism from them, if they think I'm going in the wrong direction or not living up to my capability, then I'll take it onboard. The last time that something hurt me involved Elvis Costello. I mean, I consider him a peer because we're in the same business. I'm not that well acquainted with this music or anything, but I consider him to be very serious. And he wrote me off. It had to do with the beer-commercial syndrome and all that. [*In the mid Eighties, Clapton recorded the J.J. Cale song "After Midnight" for a Michelob beer commercial. Clapton had previously recorded the track for his self-titled 1970 solo debut.*] He's got a bit of a soapbox about that, you know. He said that he could understand certain people who've got something to say doing it, but as far as he was concerned, I'd said it all and had nothing left to offer. So that, coming from a peer, is hurtful. But that will make me strive more than anything a critic will say. When a musician runs me down, then I want to prove something to him.

GW Between the period with Tim Renwick and when you teamed up with Mark Knopfler, you were the only guitarist in your band. Was that rough?

CLAPTON No, I love it. In many ways, you sacrifice a lot when you bring another great guitar player in. It's kind of a novelty at first; it's something you have to get over. With Mark I went through a great deal of being in awe, and

WITH GEORGE HARRISON

again with Phil [*Palmer*]. The first week or two of playing together, I was listening to him too much, being too self-conscious about the situation. But when you get over that, you get used to him being there. I don't ignore him, but I just go ahead as if there was no other guitar player. And I'm quite narrow and selfish, both about my boundaries and where my limits are. I don't let anyone try and knock me off.

GW With someone as unique as Knopfler, do you ever find yourself being influenced by them?

CLAPTON Not at all, no. They have their thing, I have mine. I'm actually still more influenced by records than by other players. I still try to steer myself towards my early heroes. The only person that I would be severely influenced by is Robert Cray. I mean, during that whole week when we did these things together for the album, I found I was playing far above my normal standard. I had to, because he's such a consummate and total musician that you have to be ready day and night. He's like a ninja. [*laughs*]

Normally, put into that situation, most guitar players are hit and miss; they might take two or three passes at something. Robert doesn't—it's first time, every time. That's very rare, and when you're around it, it keeps you on your toes. I would love to be in that situation all the time, but at the same time I'm a man of leisure these days. I don't wish to be on the road 360 days a year, which is what Robert does. He doesn't have anywhere to live. [*laughs*] It's a steady joke. I ask him, "Have you got anywhere to live yet?" "No." He doesn't have a house. So I don't really want to be in that place. I've been there, and I don't want to play every day anymore. And that's what it takes.

GW In two instances I can think of—the *Freddie King (1934–1976)* album and the [*1986 ITV1*] *South Bank* TV special with Buddy Guy—you sounded almost exactly like the hero you were jamming with. Was that intentional?

CLAPTON Sure. I mean, you're paying respect to the form. It would be completely fruitless for me to be playing onstage with Buddy and come out with some kind of Zeppelin-style guitar solo. I have to respect not just him but the form of the music. And what I loved first and foremost about the blues was that it had a very severe, strict form—one which you pay a great deal of attention to. There are certain notes you play for a turnaround, at the beginning of a solo, for the entry into passages. It's just as rigorous as classical music, in a sense. You have to pay respect to it. So when I'm around those guys, and when we're seriously trying to do something special, then that's the way I'll play. And I thank God I have enough experience and I studied it enough in my youth to know what *not* to do—which is more the case that *what* to do.

GW These days, the name that does seem to come up a lot, in terms of influences, is Buddy Guy's. But at the time of, say, the *Blues Breakers* album, there was more of a Freddie King or Otis Rush element. Who were your influences prior to that?

CLAPTON Well, in the Yardbirds we were trying to stay away from the classical stuff, the better-known stuff, as we knew it. So we were doing songs by Snooky Pryor or Eddie Taylor, who were more the Chicago kind of sidemen who were making records of their own but weren't necessarily as well known, because we were trying to make them sound like our original material. If we did a classic Freddie King, B.B. King or Buddy Guy song, we would seem to be paying homage; when we did a Snooky Pryor song or one by the guy who did "Wish You Would"—Billy Boy Arnold—it sounded like the Yardbirds, because nobody knew who those guys were.

In fact, all of these songs came off one album that we ripped off. It was a compilation album called "Chicago Blues" or something [Bluesville Chicago, Vol. I, *Top Rank (France)*], and it had all those songs—"I Wish You Would," "Judgment Day," "Bad Boy." That was our set—we just did that album. Even though I was aware of, and was learning to play from, Freddie's records and Buddy's records and Otis's, we avoided that as material.

And not to put these other guys down, but they were easier to cover. The great songs like [*Otis Rush's*] "Groaning the Blues" or "Double Trouble" would be so hard for, first off, a vocalist to cover. Not so bad for the band or a guitar player—they can somehow get by—but a vocalist is the man in the pole position, and he's got to be able to do as well, if not better [*than the original*]. And not too many people in this country ever made it that far.

GW As you said, growing up in England, you were dependent on whatever blues records filtered over and whichever touring artists appeared. As a result, do you think your image of blues was more romantic?

CLAPTON Yes, absolutely. And the love affair, the obsession with the blues, was reinforced by the fact that it was so inaccessible. And having made a little inroad into it, I was one of the few who had

ALAN DAVIDSON/WIREIMAGE

not only the taste for it but the gift for it, too, and I belonged to this incredibly exclusive club whose members included Keith Richards and Mick [*Green of Johnny Kidd and the Pirates*] and [*Fleetwood Mac founder*] Peter Green and people like that, who had, like, a mission. We were crusaders in a way, and that was a great, secure feeling for a person of my type, who came from a very sort of nowhere place, to have somewhere really worthwhile to go.

GW Were you happy when someone finally unearthed photos of Robert Johnson?

CLAPTON Yeah. As much as they can find is not enough. I mean, the music still transcends it all, but it's nice to have artifacts, too.

GW But as long as no one knew what he looked like, he was part man, part myth.

CLAPTON But you can preserve that. I think it's possible to leave your fantasies there. My fantasy of Robert Johnson exists in my head no matter what the reality of what his picture looks like. I still see another person. But it's close—that's the great thing. It's still a story that has to be properly told.

GW Not that it was a strict bio of Robert Johnson, but you must have been disappointed in the film *Crossroads*, for the trite way that it portrayed blues.

CLAPTON Yeah, and the concept of the guitar duel at the end was just appalling—so disappointing. I mean, the way the kid won was to revert to some kind of classical piece. What did that have to do with fucking anything?

GW One of the charms of the early British blues is that the bands were obviously so enthusiastic about the music that they went into it headlong; and that while some of the lesser bands were probably a bit too reverent, the really special ones used the records as launching pads rather than textbooks. Your version of "Hideaway" on the *Blues Breakers* album is a perfect example. Was it hard to find other players who had the facility to go beyond the originals?

CLAPTON I wasn't looking for other players to play with. I had a very competitive mind. I didn't *want* there to be any other players that had that facility. So it was enough for me to be in a band that could go with me in that direction. Pete Green and Jeff Beck were the only other players who could touch on material and then go way from it. Jeff particularly.

For instance, there's a standing joke with him and me about this song "Wee Wee Baby," off the *Folk Festival of the Blues* album. Buddy Guy kicks it off, and it's such a random start, no one seems to know how it's going to go. And Jeff's got that down so that it sounds positive and rambling at the same time. But then he'd go off, you know? It's funny, but musicians of that ilk often tend to stay away from one another—they keep their distance because they want to stay in that space where they're untouchable.

GW Prior to joining the Yardbirds, what band did you sing in, and what was your material?

CLAPTON I had been singing with the Stones, and on one occasion I'd put together a band consisting of me and a drummer to play a local dance. I sang everything—Chuck Berry, Bo Diddley—just R&B mainly. In the Yardbirds, it was assumed that Keith [*Relf*] was the singer. It wasn't up to me to actually decide anything at all. I had a very small voice in the band. It wasn't until later, when I started getting a following of my own, that the rest of the band considered me to have any input at all. And then I would say, "Let's do 'Good Morning, Little Schoolgirl,' " and I would get a chance to sing. I didn't push myself, because I was still more interested in being the guitar player.

GW These days a lot of people seem to dump on the Yardbirds because...

CLAPTON Is that so?

GW Well, in the *South Bank* special about you, for instance, Pete Townshend said that, apart from you, "they really were a shambles."

CLAPTON Well, you know, Pete, for instance, had a different perspective on the whole thing. He was into Martha & the Vandellas and Tamla/Motown, and what we were doing didn't really register. He only became aware of the great blues musicians much later in his career. He was a pop musician from the word "go," and that's not a slam on his character or way of thinking—he just came in from a different place.

And the Yardbirds liked to listen to "Five Long Years" by Eddie Boyd. That's what we listened to, and in what we played even then there was a great chasm of difference. We thought something like "I'm a Man" was pretty commercial compared to what we were listening to, because we were all into Jesse Fuller or Furry Lewis. Those records were gold dust to us. We were *country* blues fanatics, but to play we had to have records to emulate that had drums and bass and guitars. So they had to be R&B records.

GW As for the blues records that managed to filter over to England, you managed to luck out a lot, in terms of getting really good stuff.

CLAPTON Well, that's not true. No, there was a great deal of discrimination involved, too. There were a lot of other things. We had Josh White, who came to England almost once a year, and for most people, he was the blues. But I saw through that. I don't know what gave me the insight, but to me Jesse Fuller on that one album [Jazz, Folk Songs, Spiritual & Blues *(Good Time Jazz)*] had far more real feeling than Josh White ever did. But that was what was available, and there was lot of that stuff being dished over here.

So, yeah, there was a lot of discrimination involved, too. Sonny Terry and Brownie McGhee came here too, and they were great, but I remember thinking, There has to be something more. When they came to these shores, they were far heavier than anything we'd experienced before, but still I had an inkling that there was something *more* intense. I don't know what gave me that insight—I thank God for it, to this day—but I just knew.

GW What was the first thing you uncovered that sort of struck that chord?

CLAPTON Without a doubt, it was Freddie King: "I Love the Woman," on the B-side of "Hide Away." That just sent me into a complete kind of ecstasy, and it scared the shit out of me. I'd never heard anything like it, and I thought I'd never ever get anywhere near it. And I know now that I never will, but it was what immediately made me want to carry on.

GW Freddie King's solos and choruses on his instrumentals are about as perfect as anyone could ask for—like compositions unto themselves.

CLAPTON They are. His taste was like that. He never played anything that you could imagine him regretting.

GW In addition to the usual Cream reunion rumor, there's a new one going around—that the Bluesbreakers will have a reunion.

CLAPTON That's definite. The rumor about Cream was invented from the outside. It never occurred to me, and I'm actually not that keen to ever try it, to be honest, because there was such a great gulf of difference between me and Jack [*Bruce*] and Ginger [*Baker*], even when we were together. But there is a definite plan to do a tribute to John in November. I don't know if we're going to do an album, a show, a concert or what. [*Fleetwood Mac's*] John McVie and Mick Fleetwood are doing it, and it would be great if Pete Green could come out of retirement, but I don't know if that's possible. I met him on the street not more than a year ago, and to me he's a great guy, and he was just the same. He didn't look particularly healthy, and he seemed like he was kind of pissed off in general, but that's quite a healthy attitude to have, in some respects. It's not as if he was indifferent. So I would never completely give up on the guy.

GW Didn't he visit you at home a few years back?

CLAPTON Yeah, I took him in for about three weeks and listened to him whine and moan about the business and life in general, and I would kind of absorb it all, and I'd just keep playing music—which in the summertime I do anyway. In the morning I get up and I put music on—opera, classical music, guitar music, blues, jazz, all kinds—all day. After he was there about a week, I noticed him dancing in the garden one day—so he was changing. And he actually left with a very different, positive outlook. It just seemed to be a healing experience for him, because to have music played to you by someone else takes away your responsibility. You can just enjoy without having to choose or contribute anything. It was good for him. And I'd happily do it again; I love the guy very much.

GW Did he pick up a guitar while he was there?

CLAPTON No, we didn't play, and I didn't want to put him in that position. He may have played while I wasn't looking or wasn't around—that's extremely likely. But the last time I saw him, he'd deliberately grown his fingernails so long that he couldn't play. When

"I WASN'T LOOKING FOR OTHERS TO PLAY WITH. I HAD A VERY COMPETITIVE MIND."

you get that angry, it's healthy, and I think he'll probably come out sooner or later.

GW He sure was great.

CLAPTON One of the best—he really is. And I'm not gonna say, "was," either. He *is* one of the best. It's all there.

GW What's your view of reunions, in general—like the Who or the Stones?

CLAPTON I think they're great—if there's something there that they all want to go through again. I don't particularly know how Pete [*Townshend*] feels about it; I know from what I heard that in the last days of the Who when they were working a lot, it was a painful experience for him, and having lost Keith they just felt that they were going through the motions. And if you go through that for a long time, there must be a lot to get over when you do reunite. The Stones, too. Knowing the enmity that's existed between Keith and Mick for so long, it must be tough—a lot to get over. But that, in a sense, is a great character-building process, too. I've been around those guys—most recently when Bill [*Wyman, former Stones bassist*] got married, I saw them all back together again—and when they're together, even though they may have their differences, they are such a powerful gang of people. They rise above all kinds of hierarchies when they're together. They're strong, strong, strong, and it makes you feel really good to be anywhere near it. So I'd like to see them on tour again, but it doesn't always work. I think in the case of the Stones, it will work. But with Cream, I don't think it would.

GW Why not?

CLAPTON Because I don't think the desire is there. If Ginger's got a strong desire to get it back again, I think it's nostalgia more than anything else. I don't think there's a desire to create anything new. For me, it would be very difficult to conceive of creating anything new with those guys.

GW When they reunited you and Jack Bruce on the *South Bank* special, what was great was that, even though it was a special about you, he was playing on your turf—literally on your back porch. He wasn't going to be denied. His ego was as strong as ever.

CLAPTON To be honest, that's one thing that prevents me from going back: my ego would have to just disappear altogether. Though I'm sure they would respect my ideas, because those guys are very aggressive and forceful, I know that when it came down to the first day on the floor, they would just be scraggling for the front.

GW Probably more so than before.

CLAPTON Yeah, even more so than they were then. I can't work with that anymore; I don't *want* to work in that anymore. I like a laid-back, easy attitude, and that's what I get when I'm the boss. People that work with me will tell you it's a very easy situation; I don't come down hard on anyone, and I don't give them too many hard things to do. So it's fun, and I like to keep it that way. It wouldn't be fun with Cream; it would be fuckin' hard work. Although it may produce great results, it would just be a very arduous process—something I'm not that keen on.

GW As the one guy who calls the shots, being able to have things your way, do you think there's an element that's missing in, say, not having a bass player that challenges you the way Jack did?

CLAPTON I'm sure. But, no, Nathan [*East*] does that as much as I need him to, and more. You see, as much as I love Jack's playing, Nathan is more of a blues player than Jack is, you know—and more of a rock and roll player, too. Jack has a much more jazz-oriented slant on the whole thing. So I prefer to play with Nathan.

GW But aside from playing—the personality...

CLAPTON Well, I'm in a position now to choose, man. I mean, if I *had* to work with Cream because I had no other work, I would do it. But if I've got the choice, I'll play with the band that I select. And I wouldn't select those guys to be in my band because they are lead musicians. I'd have to get out of the way. And I don't want to get out of the fuckin' way; I want to be in the front now. Maybe I didn't then, but I do now.

GW Could we chronologically run down the various guitars you've used in your career? After the hollowbody Kay Jazz II you played in the Roosters, with the Yardbirds you used a Tele, an ES-335 and a Jazzmaster.

CLAPTON The Kay was the guitar that my grandmother bought me on the "high-purchase" scheme. That got me into the band, and then we started making money, I found I had nothing else to spend it on but guitars, so maybe once a month I bought a guitar. The unfortunate thing was I didn't keep them. The only one I've still got is the 335; it's the oldest guitar in my collection. Well, not the oldest, but the one I've had the longest. It's beautiful. But I had the Jazzmaster, the Tele, and also at one time I think a Silvertone that looked just like Jimmy Reed's.

GW Do you remember which of those guitars you used for the Yardbirds' recordings?

CLAPTON I think the Tele. Or the Gibson, but more likely the Tele, because I remember breaking strings a lot, and that's why I moved to the Tele.

GW Is the Bluesbreakers-period Les Paul the one that was stolen?

CLAPTON Yes, that one was stolen during rehearsals for Cream.

GW So you didn't use it on *Fresh Cream*?

CLAPTON No, I borrowed a guitar for that; it was a borrowed Les Paul. I went through quite a few and until about five years ago never got one that was anywhere near the original one in terms of the neck shape and fingerboard.

GW Both *Blues Breakers* and *Fresh Cream* have such classic Les Paul tones. They were both played through Marshall amps. Were they different types of Marshalls?

CLAPTON Yeah, I think on *Fresh Cream* we had a bigger, 100-watt [*a JTM45 rather than the 50-watt 1962 combo*].

GW Did you know that Marshall has reissued the 1962 combo as "The Bluesbreaker"?

CLAPTON Did they really? How sweet. I didn't even know that. How does it sound? You know, that's be good, because I'm always looking for something to replace this Fender tweed [*Twin*]. You can't take it on the road; it's pretty unreliable. So to have something of that strength that would be reliable would be worth looking into.

GW When you switched to the psychedelic-painted '61 SG/Les Paul onstage with Cream, did you also use it in the studio?

CLAPTON Yeah, *Disraeli Gears*, I think, and from then on, really, a lot of the time. That became my mainstay until I bought a Gibson Firebird with one pickup, and that for a time became my most favorite guitar. All during Cream I didn't really have a favorite guitar because I never really replaced the Les Paul, and I was constantly searching for something to come up to scratch. I'd play the ES-335, or the SG or this Firebird. I don't think I had a Fender—I think it was only Gibsons—but I may have toyed with it.

GW The '61 SG/Les Paul must have come with the big sideways vibrato tailpiece.

CLAPTON It came with the sideways tremolo on it, which I took apart, but I kept the bridge and the tailpiece. I never liked tremolos; I've never been able to stand the bloody things. Eventually I put a stop tailpiece on it.

GW At the debut performance of Blind Faith, you played a bound Telecaster with a Strat neck. Was that an idea you had?

CLAPTON Yeah, I had probably two or three Strats, and I never liked the Tele neck. And I thought it would be unusual and might have people guessing what kind of guitar it was because of the head.

GW The Strat first became your trademark on the *Eric Clapton* solo album. Is that the same Strat that was used on *Layla*?

CLAPTON Yeah, the brown [*sunburst*] one [*a.k.a. "Blackie"*].

GW A lot of Strat players, like Jimmie Vaughan and early Buddy Guy, get a twangy sound without a lot of sustain, but you get a lot of sustain with a Strat. Is that a product of your vibrato?

CLAPTON It's that and a combination of the new active system in my particular guitar. If you jack that up a bit, it doesn't give you more sustain than when it's flat. And the old tweed Fender Twin, which is my number-one amp in the studio: I found it at Pete's Guitars in Minneapolis–St. Paul years ago. It's been rewired several times, because it heats up. Cesar Diaz came in and insulated everything with this extra-strong cable, because it would melt after you played it for a while.

GW Did you use the Eric Clap-

"I WAS ONE OF THE FEW GUITARISTS WHO HAD NOT ONLY THE TASTE FOR THE BLUES BUT THE GIFT FOR IT, TOO."

AT THE ROYAL ALBERT HALL, MAY 4, 2004

HOWARD DENNER/RETNA

ton Signature model on *Journeyman*?

CLAPTON Exclusively, yeah. The only song I don't use it on is "Hard Times," where I used the ES-335 to get a kind of an old studio sound, a more acoustic blues guitar tone.

GW Do you currently own a Les Paul?

CLAPTON Yes, a very, very good one that's almost identical to the one that was stolen.

GW Do you ever feel like breaking it out for that Bluesbreakers type of sound?

CLAPTON I don't really get into that, because it's too reminiscent of Cream, I think. I don't think about the Bluesbreakers as much as I do about Cream and that thick, solid, Gibson sound. I like to *approach* that, which I can do with a Fender, but I don't like to be limited to it, which is what you have with a Les Paul—you're stuck with that, really. But you can get close to that, and have it, in fact, with a Strat—or you can back off on it, too.

GW Let's talk some more about amps. What did you play through in the Yardbirds?

CLAPTON Umm, I think they were Vox. An AC30.

GW With Cream you used a 100-watt JTM45 stack?

CLAPTON Two of them.

GW To get the so-called "woman tone" on *Disraeli Gears* were you still playing through the same setup—the SG/Les Paul and Marshall stack—with the guitar's tone backed off?

CLAPTON With the tone backed off on the neck pickup.

GW Backed off how much?

CLAPTON All the way, and full volume.

GW What amps did you use during the *Layla* sessions?

CLAPTON During the album? [*Fender*] Champs. Onstage, I'm not so sure: Marshalls or maybe a Fender Showman, because I would want to keep the Champ sound, but just have it bigger. Which isn't what happened, but that's what you think the idea would be.

GW At some point in the Seventies, you switched to Music Man amps. Were those the first master-volume amps you used?

CLAPTON That was the first time I ran into that concept, and to this day I still find it very hard to get along with. I don't like too many options in an amplifier. The simplicity of an early Fender is what I want. If I want it to distort, I'll just turn it up full volume, and it will do that. But when you've got all these permutations, you just spend too long fiddling around on the knobs.

GW In your soundtrack work, do you feel as though you're coming up with a certain approach, or is it strictly a product of the story and characters in each case?

CLAPTON It depends on the project. On [*the 1988 film*] *Homeboy,* I got a lot of feedback from the director and the producers. They wanted a specific thing to echo the character played by Mickey Rourke; they wanted to have an element of country, an element of blues; they wanted it to be wistful and slightly melancholic. So they were with me while I wrote the melodies and recorded them, and they had a lot to say about it. That's how that one came about, but internally I'm always pretty sure of what I want to do, and if they don't agree I'll generally override them—unless they're really definite about something.

But that film was a bit of a disaster because we finished it, and then sent it off to Mickey, and he didn't like it. He said the music didn't echo his character strongly enough. So then the director walked off, and Mickey came and started recutting the film to make this character stronger. And I had to recut some of the music with Mickey directing me. I have yet to see the finished project, but it felt better with him involved.

The other one, *Lethal Weapon 2*, I did while I was doing *Journeyman*. It was a *joy* to do because I was involved with Michael Kamen and David Sanborn again—this time live with David. For the original *Lethal Weapon*, we recorded with him in the States and me in England, but this time we actually had a chance to play off one another. We took each main theme and extended it to make a record, so it's going to be a killer album, one of the strongest things I've done.

GW When you record your blues album, will you work with your own band or will you seek out musicians who play blues exclusively for a living?

CLAPTON The plan as it stands is to recreate the kind of Texas blues band that Bobby Blue Bland had. If I can, I'll get [*saxophonists*] Fathead Newman and Hank Crawford again and supplement them with other horns, and also Johnny Johnson, from Chuck Berry's band, on piano, and try to make a hybrid that isn't particularly Texas or Chicago but has the elements of each—and then just superimpose myself on top.

We'll do material which has already been done—"Five Long Years" maybe, or "She Moves Me" and some Muddy songs and early Bobby Bland things—but mix it all up. The reason I've gone on this, and I think it could be a success, is that one track I did for *The Color of Money*, which never made it to the album—you can only hear it in the film way in the background—was a version of "It's My Life" by Bobby Blues Bland, backed by a little English blues band called the Bigtown Playboys. Have you seen them? They're great. The keyboard player [*Mike Sanchez*] is unbelievable. He has it down. We did the session in a day, and that's what's inspired me to go ahead on this. I want to do it with a fairly big band; I don't want to do a country blues album. Sophisticated arrangements and modern. I'm not looking for authenticity, just feeling. GL

TOP: NEIL ZLOZOWER; BOTTOM LEFT: ADRIAN BOOT/LFI; BOTTOM RIGHT: NICHOLAS BURNHAM/RETNA

AMAZING GRACE

In a world exclusive interview with *MTV Unplugged* producer Alex Coletti, ERIC CLAPTON discusses the recording of his 1994 Grammy-winning album and the joys of playing acoustic guitar.

INTRODUCTION BY HAROLD STEINBLATT

Reprinted from Guitar World, *June 1993*

"I **TRY TO FIND** the places I've been before," Eric Clapton told an interviewer in the early Nineties. "To go back and find a phrase which has a meaning, that belongs to some part of my experience, is very valuable to me because it will put me in touch with something that may involve lots of thought processes that I had forgotten, which are still quite valid."

Coletti believes that the unique intimacy afforded by the *Unplugged* format made it the ideal place for Clapton "to unplug his soul for us with such great dignity and grace." The guitarist also used the warm environment of the show to "teach his listeners a lesson in music history, not only introducing a generation of MTV viewers to a world of country blues songs, but also demonstrating that a man with an acoustic guitar can seriously rock out."

In a larger sense, Clapton's achievement can be explained in terms of something even more powerful than anything described above: the power of love and memory. Rock and roll guitarists, like baseball players, welders and housewives, are often masters of the art of denial. Not Eric Clapton. He is a devoted servant of his memory, and he clearly remembers everything. His incredible performance on *Unplugged* was fed by some of his most powerful recollections—and loves. His set list tells the story: country blues tunes he played in his youth, reworkings of songs from *Layla*, his most passionately romantic album, new compositions about his lost son.

Hours after his *Unplugged* performance, Eric Clapton met with Alex Coletti on a darkened stage, and provided some background to the memories he had just celebrated so beautifully for millions of people.

ALEX COLETTI Eric, how did you come to compose the opening instrumental, "Signe"?

ERIC CLAPTON It was written on a boat of the same name last year. I was on holiday with my manager and we chartered *Signe*, a beautiful yacht. It was a difficult time in my life, and I was writing to heal myself. "Signe" was the first thing I started to write. It's just a melody which I dedicated to and named after the boat.

COLETTI Why did you decide to perform Bo Diddley's "Before You Accuse Me"?

CLAPTON That was one of the very first records I ever heard. I think it was on an album that also featured "Hey Bo Diddley," "I'm a Man," "Bring It to Jerome" and lots of other good things. I chose "Before You Accuse Me" because it's a straight blues, and can be played any way you like, which is great. I play it live with electric guitar, and I thought it would be nice to try it on the two acoustics as well.

COLETTI It seems that whenever you decide to perform a cover version of a song, they become *your* songs—people forget the originals.

CLAPTON Well, I hope that's the case. I heard most of the cover songs in this set when I was very young, and I've always wanted to play them. This was a great opportunity for me to pay homage to the things that originally influenced me.

For example, "Hey Hey" was written by Big Bill Broonzy, and it was probably the first blues song I ever heard. I used to play it in pubs when I was very young. I never felt that I mastered it, so I wanted to give it another shot.

COLETTI Tell me about the writing process for "Tears in Heaven."

CLAPTON It was written for the film *Rush*. The timing was perfect, because they needed a song about loss and I had plenty of them. "Tears in Heaven" was actually in a very embryonic stage when I was approached, and I completed it for *Rush*. I needed the film to finish it, because otherwise I probably would have let it go. It was also a good opportunity for me to write about the loss of my son and have somewhere to put it—to channel it—because it didn't look like I was going into the studio in the near future. I really wanted to be able to say something about what happened to me, and the opportunity that this movie presented me was excellent, because it meant that I could write this song and express my feelings and have it come out quickly.

"THESE SONGS HELPED ME GET THROUGH A VERY HARD PATCH IN MY LIFE AND I WANTED TO MAKE THEM PUBLIC."

After the song was done, I thought that it would be nice to put it out as a single as well. There were other songs like it, of course, but that was the *one*.

COLETTI The availability of the film footage from *Rush* for the video for "Tears in Heaven" must have also made the whole thing easier for you. You didn't have to deal with creating potentially painful original visuals.

CLAPTON Yeah. I didn't want a theme video for that. I just really wanted to perform it, and I think that was the original idea for the video, but when they intercut the film footage it gave it much more of a message—a lot more feeling.

COLETTI "The Circus Left Town" is one of several new songs you debuted on *Unplugged*. What can you tell us about it?

CLAPTON Some of the songs are still in a very early stage of development, but they will be on a record someday. "The Circus Left Town" is about my son and the last night I spent with him, which was, in fact, at the circus. It's ...there's not much I can say about it, except that these songs helped me get through a very hard patch in my life and I wanted to make them public. In fact, my performance on MTV was the first time they were played publicly in any form.

COLETTI If these songs are part of a healing process, does playing them in front of people further that process?

CLAPTON Yes. I think that with what happened to me last year—the loss of my son—my audience would have been very surprised if I didn't make some reference to it. And I wouldn't want to insult them by not sharing my grief with them in some way. So I do intend to make these things known, and I will play the songs in concert and put them on record. It is a healing process for me, and I think it's important to share that with people who love your music.

COLETTI Is "Lonely Stranger" part of the "healing process" song cycle?

CLAPTON Sort of. I wrote that in Los Angeles while I was doing the score for *Rush*. I was just very lonely in L.A.—I felt like an English exile trying to beat the odds. You can get a lot of very strange vibrations coming in from the outside and doing something with the film industry. I really wrote that song to try to kind of cheer myself up.

COLETTI Tell me about "My Father's Eyes."

CLAPTON It was another song I wrote on holiday last year, when I had a kind of revelation about my son. It's a very personal matter, but I never met my father, and I realized that the closest I ever came to looking in my father's eyes was when I looked into my son's eyes. So I wrote this song about that. It's a strange kind of cycle thing that occurred to me, and another thing I felt I would like to share. That's how that song came about.

COLETTI You recorded "Nobody Knows You When You're Down and

RIGHT AT MADISON SQUARE GARDEN, SEPTEMBER 1995

AL PEREIRA

LEFT IN CONCERT DURING THE EIGHTIES

COURTESY EVERETT COLLECTION

Out" on the *Layla* album, and again now. What is the song's history?

CLAPTON That's an old Bessie Smith song, which goes back to 1910 or 1915. I heard an English guy play it in the pubs when I was 14 or 15, and I learned it and played it around the pubs, myself. It was part of my early, early repertoire. In fact, it was one of the first songs I felt I could sing because it was very melodramatic and I could put all this angst into it. I did also do it with Derek and the Dominos, but this is the way I originally did it with the acoustic guitar.

COLETTI When was the last time you played it this way?

CLAPTON Oh God—maybe 30 years ago.

COLETTI You also did an arrangement of "Layla" that is very different from the original.

CLAPTON Yeah. "Layla" sort of mystified me. I've done it the same all these years, and never considered trying to revamp it, the way a lot of artists might. Bob Dylan, for instance, changes everything every time he plays a song. I thought this was a great opportunity to just take "Layla" off on a different path and put it to a shuffle. For a start, making it acoustic denied all the riffs—which I think would have really sounded a bit weak on the acoustic. So it just seemed to naturally become jazzier. And, of course, I'm singing it a whole octave down, which gives it a nice atmosphere.

"THERE IS A BEAUTIFUL SOUND TO BE GAINED FROM THE ACTUAL TOUCH OF THE FINGER TO THE STRING."

COLETTI Did you experiment with the arrangement?

CLAPTON Well, [*second guitarist*] Andy Fairweather Low and myself were at my house doing some pre-rehearsal rehearsal for this and I just picked up the guitar and said, "What do you think of this?" And it just happened—it clicked straight away. So we kept it like that.

COLETTI "Running on Faith" was on *Journeyman*.

CLAPTON Yeah. Jerry Lynn Williams wrote that, and I'd heard him play it on piano and on acoustic and electric and a lot of different ways and arrangements, so I knew that the song was easily adaptable. So that made it an obvious song to do. I also wanted to include it because it's a regular part of my stage repertoire and thus fairly well-known.

COLETTI It was good to see you play dobro.

CLAPTON Yeah. I played one on the record. I usually don't play it onstage, so that was another opportunity—this program is great to give me these opportunities to do things that I've always done at home but don't do onstage.

COLETTI Do you often play slide at home?

CLAPTON Not so much actually, but I would like to play more slide, and I think it's something you have to be careful with on an electric. I mean it is ideally suited for acoustic guitar, and all of my original heroes played the slide and bottleneck, so maybe it's something I'll get into again.

COLETTI Speaking of original heroes, you played Robert Johnson's "Walking Blues."

CLAPTON It is, but I've turned it into a hybrid song, really. I borrowed the guitar part from one of the first Muddy Waters songs I ever heard, called "Feel Like Going Home," then I superimposed Robert Johnson's lyrics. It's sort of my simultaneous tribute to both of them. It's a piece I've played since I was 14, but I only recently decided to start singing it.

COLETTI Speaking of singing, the sound of your voice really penetrates in an acoustic setting. Are you feeling more comfortable vocally?

CLAPTON I often enjoy singing in an acoustic setting more than an amplified one. When you're onstage with an electric band going through a massive P.A. system, it's very artificial. You can't really hear your own voice as it comes out of

your mouth. You have to depend on the loudspeakers and monitors. So it's such a joy to sing with a full band acoustically and be able to hear your voice; I find it so much easier to adjust the volume of my own voice. Here, I could sing quietly, which allows me to have more dynamic range.

COLETTI What are the origins of the song "Alberta"?

CLAPTON It's an old Snooks Eaglin song, which is, again, something I heard when I was very young. Snooks Eaglin's *Street Singer* album was an important part of my record collection. He was a great, great player and singer who recorded on the streets of New Orleans. The variety of his repertoire was absolutely amazing, but that song "Alberta" was accessible to me as a beginning guitar player, because it consists of three chords and just straight strumming. It just lodged in my head as a very sentimental song, and part of my early influences.

By the way, Snooks is still active, but he's indoors now; he doesn't work the streets anymore. He works in clubs and makes very good records. He's a great artist.

COLETTI What inspired you to do "San Francisco Bay Blues"?

CLAPTON I don't know. I've heard several versions of it, but the first one I heard was performed by Jesse Fuller—and it was Jesse Fuller as a one-man band. He had two bass drums, a foot bass, harmonica, kazoos and a great, big 12-string guitar. It was one of those songs he played in pubs to get free beer, so it's very accessible on a sing-along level. I just wanted to do this song because it's never gone away—just like "Hey Hey" and "Alberta." These songs have never left my head; they're always there in a part of my life.

COLETTI You concluded the MTV set with another Robert Johnson song, "Malted Milk."

CLAPTON "Malted Milk" is a peculiar song. It's very ironic, because it's quite clear that it's not malted milk he's referring to throughout the song. It came from a period where Robert was changing his style, and it sounds to me like he came across Lonnie Johnson in his travels. There was a massive shift in his style of accompaniment and his style of singing.

I've never approached this song before—and probably wouldn't have if I hadn't had this opportunity to try it out. It's a very beautiful song and it's very simple and I wanted to end the set with it because it sort of brings it back home for me.

COLETTI So is Robert the first influence?

CLAPTON He's the most important influence I've had in my life and always will be, I think.

COLETTI Did you start out playing an acoustic?

CLAPTON The first guitar I ever had was a gut-string Spanish guitar, and I couldn't really get the hang of it. I was only 13, and I talked my grandparents into buying it for me. I tried and tried and tried, but got nowhere with it. I finally gave up after a year and a half. I started getting interested in the guitar again after hearing Muddy Waters, because it sounded like it was easier—wrong! [*laughs*] I wanted an electric guitar and, again, I talked my grandparents into buying me one. And, actually, within a very short period of time I got somewhere with it.

So I had two starts, really. However, the second time around I bumped into people who had the same interests—who liked Muddy Waters, Little Walter, Big Bill Broonzy, Robert Johnson. And those people I bumped into were the original Yardbirds; we used to play together a lot at parties and ended up forming an official band. That was really when I became a professional; it was within a very short amount of time.

COLETTI I'd never seen you play finger-style prior to this performance. Is this a new development?

CLAPTON I did play a lot of fingerstyle when I first started playing. I could never really find the right combination of flatpick or fingerpick so playing fingerstyle is really the easiest way—though it's quite strenuous on the fingertips. I think you get a nice tone that way; I wouldn't mind trying it on electric. There is a beautiful sound to be gained from the actual touch of the finger to the string, but that requires a lot of dexterity. Mark Knopfler's got it and Stevie Ray had it, but I haven't done it for along time. It's something I just recently started to work on again.

COLETTI Is that why you're soaking your fingertips as we speak?

CLAPTON You need surgical spirits to harden them up and witch hazel to take the sting out. That's the deal.

COLETTI I was a little bit surprised that you decided to use your whole band.

CLAPTON When we came in for rehearsals I wasn't sure what I'd do—whether it should just be me solo or with another guitar and/or bass. So we tried it a couple of days with everyone and I thought we'd whittle the band down through process of elimination and say, "Well, that's nice, but it's not quite right." And keep going like that until it sounded right. But everyone had such a nice touch and they all managed to restrain themselves. I think it's a great experience in self-restraint and discipline. I mean, guys like [*drummer*]Steve Ferrone very rarely play this quietly. Anyhow, everyone held back, so I ended using almost everyone on almost everything, and I think it still sounds good.

COLETTI Prior to your own appearance, had you been aware of the show *Unplugged*?

CLAPTON The only time I was really aware of it was a couple of years ago when I was in America and saw Don Henley do it. I also caught a bit of Hall & Oates singing [*the Beatles'*] "Don't Let Me Down," which was great. Since I thought I'd like to do the show one day, I sort of avoided watching it—I didn't want to be influenced by the way other people approached it. In fact, someone sent me a tape of Elton John on the show and I refused to watch it, because it was getting close to me doing the show and I didn't want to be influenced. I wanted to do it as if it were brand new. I don't know how my show will tally in with others, but we'll see. GL

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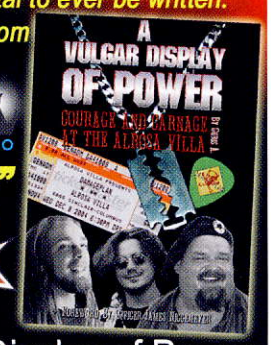

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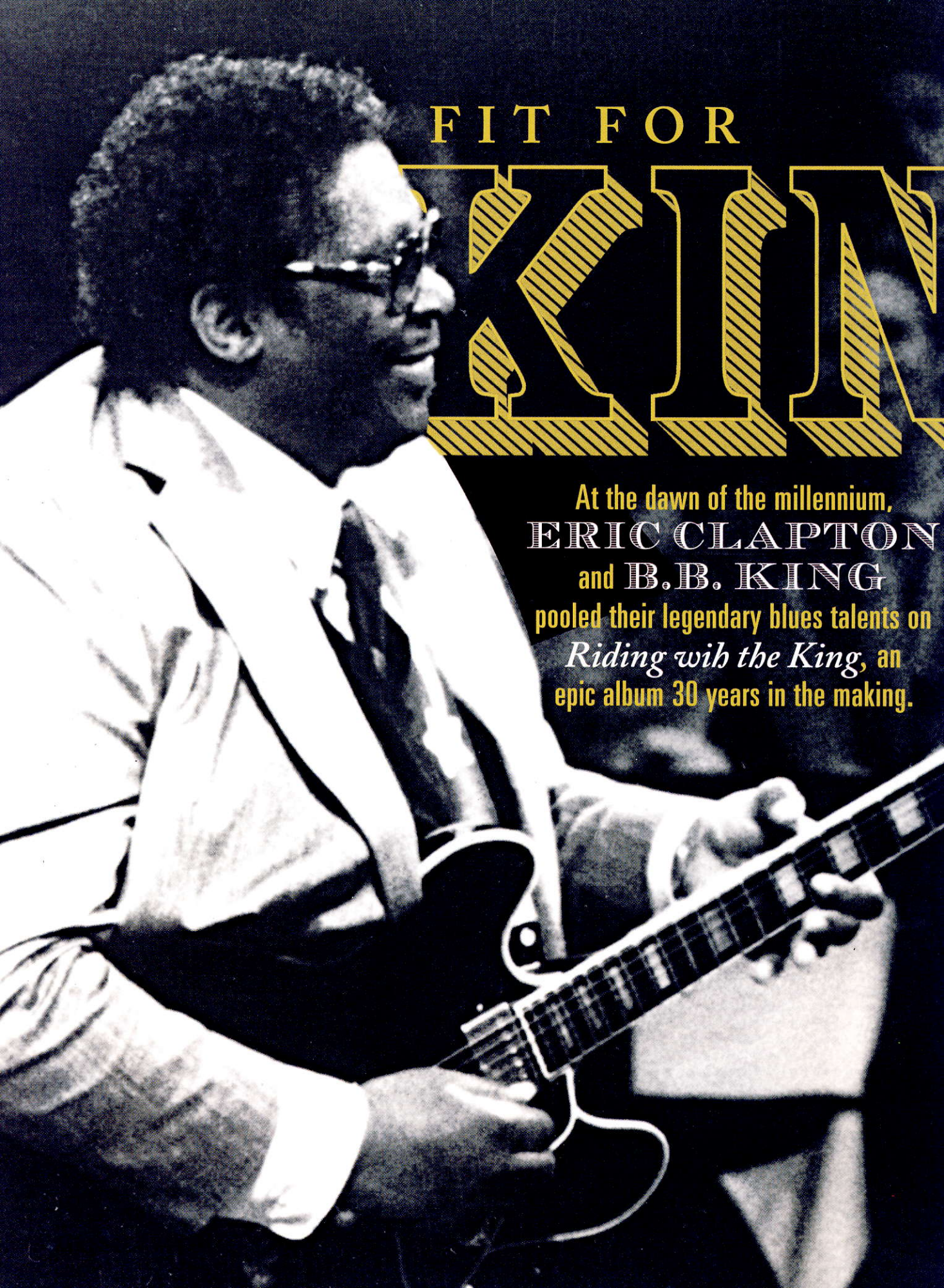
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Riding wih the King, an
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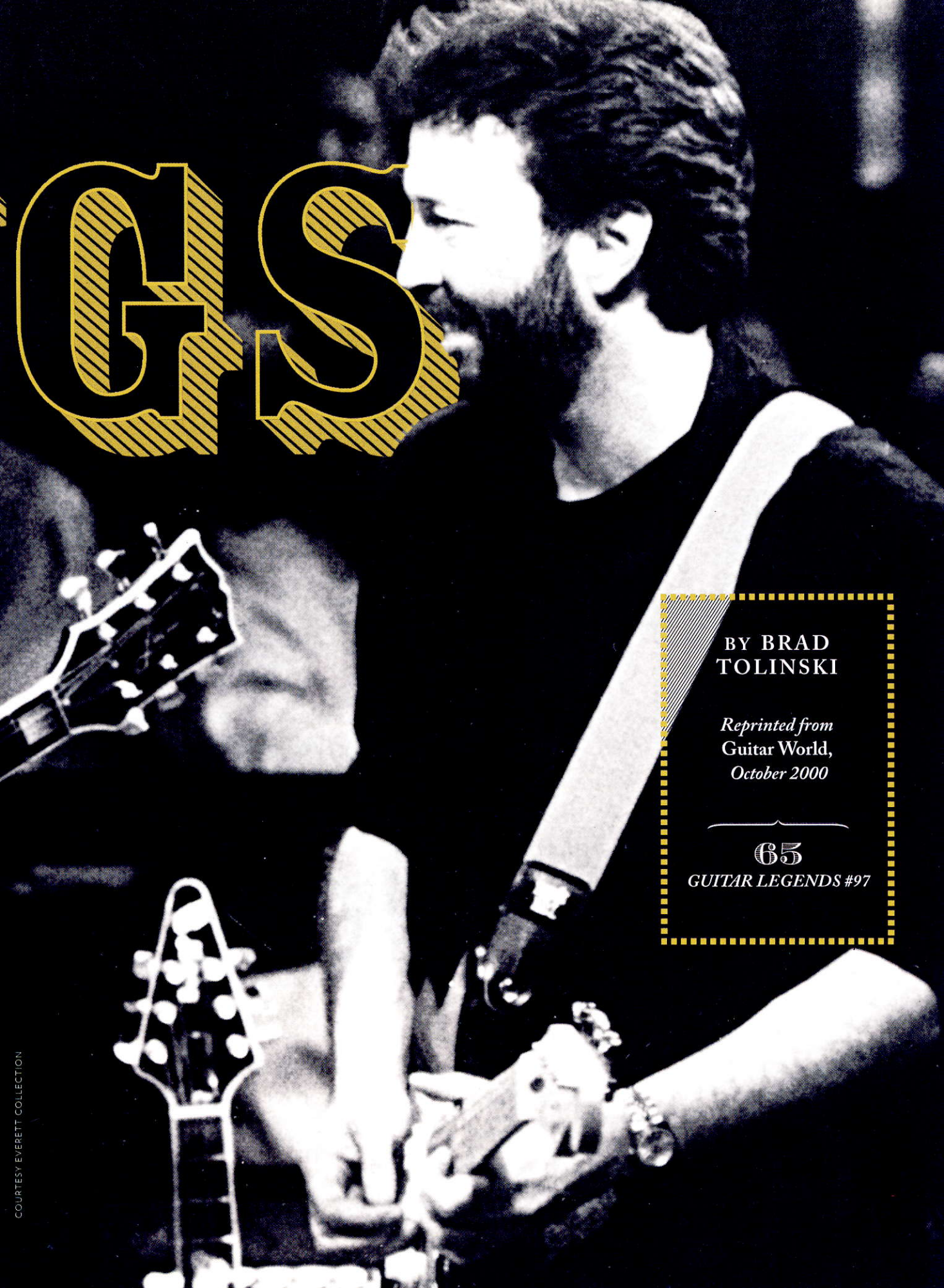

BY BRAD TOLINSKI

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GUITAR LEGENDS #97

COURTESY EVERETT COLLECTION

WHEN ERIC CLAPTON arrived in New York in 1967, he was the toast of the town. The rock community was buzzing about the British blues prodigy and his new band, Cream, whose slinky "I Feel Free" was fast becoming a staple on underground radio. Naturally, all eyes were on him and his wildly curly hair when he strolled into Manhattan's Cafe Au Go Go to see his friend Al Kooper play with his new band, Blood, Sweat and Tears. For Clapton, it was a night to remember, but not for the reasons you'd think.

As fate would have it, in the club that evening was one of Clapton's idols, B.B. King, whose shattering vocals and stinging guitar vibrato on songs like "Three O'Clock Blues" and "Ten Long Years" had made an indelible mark on the young virtuoso. When King introduced himself, the Englishman was beside himself. And when he invited Eric to join him in an after-hours jam session, Clapton later remarked, "It was like all my dreams were coming true."

Over the next 30 years, the duo's paths crossed many, many times. Each time, both vowed that someday they would get together in a studio and make one of their musical encounters official. However, with their hectic schedules it was easier said than done. Then, last year, Clapton decided to make good on their mutual vow. With King's blessing, he booked time in a studio, hired a band and over a three-month period in Los Angeles the two blues legends ripped it up on a surprisingly varied set of contemporary and classic blues material, from King's Fifties signature song, "Ten Long Years," to John Hiatt's hooky, pop rocker "Riding with the King."

In the following 2000 interview, Clapton and King reminisce about the good old days and detail the events that led up to their historic, Platinum-bound pairing, *Riding with the King*.

GUITAR WORLD What do you remember about Cafe Au Go Go in 1967?

B.B. KING Good music, that's what I remember. We was having big fun at the time. Musicians, in my opinion, were a little bit different from the way we are now. They used to get together and jam a lot and exchange ideas. I don't see that much now, do you?

ERIC CLAPTON I don't. And I don't know where they would do it. Jam sessions happened a lot more in those days. People played together all the time in America.

KING Yeah, there were no "big I" and "little you" people at that time. Everybody was sort of liberal with their amplifiers, too. Everybody got a chance to hear the other one a bit. A lot of times now, you go in for a jam session, and, boy, if you ain't got a powerful amp, you might as well go home.

CLAPTON Yeah, everyone played at reasonable volumes back then.

GW So is it fair to say this album was 30 years in the making?

CLAPTON Well, it only became a reality for me about three or four years ago because I started to feel like maybe I had become enough of a musician to share the same space on an album with B.B.

KING Oh, listen to that, will you?

CLAPTON No, I'm not kidding. I mean, I never would have even considered it before. [*laughs*]

KING [*feels Clapton's forehead*] You don't seem to have a fever. [*laughs*]

CLAPTON It wasn't even worth considering four or five years ago. And then each time we would meet up, we would talk about recording with each other and say this is something that we really need to do. And then it was, like, Well, when are we gonna do it? Maybe we should actually put some plans into action.

KING Well, from the very first time that we talked about it, I had my fingers crossed, saying, "Please let it happen." I've known this guy for quite a while, but until we started working on this project, I never realized the size of his talent and how sharp his mind is. He pulled out tunes that I had completely forgotten about. I was excited just to be reminded of all these tunes that had slipped my mind. I mean, I'm not talking about what we recorded, I'm talking about a lot of tunes that we did not do.

CLAPTON But, you know, both of us have always been busy guys. I know his schedule doesn't leave much room for anything. We started planning this a year ago—it took us that long to find free time in our lives. I don't work half as hard as this guy. When he's on the road, I've got plans to go fishing, you know?

I'm much more casual than B.B. I couldn't work the schedule he works. But nevertheless, we both had commitments, and finally it just meant that we had to say, "Well, next year we'll do it." And then once that commitment was made, we were off and running.

GW What was it like to be in the studio together?

KING For me, fantastic. Eric is never late. I don't know how people do that. [*laughs*] He's never late. He's always on time, and he's real business-like when you get started to work. He's real business. Other than that, we just joked and had fun. But when you get down to the business of making music, he's right there. Not only is he, in my opinion, number one as a guitarist but also in the way he thinks about music.

Another thing, Eric is a great person. But I don't want to just sit here and throw compliments at him, 'cause he gets embarrassed. [*laughs*]

CLAPTON He's right, it *is* embarrassing. See, the privilege of doing this, for me, was that I've known B.B. for a long, long time, and I knew that he would trust me, you know? And when we started to do this, he said, "Whatever you want to do, we'll do it your way." So, that was an incredible privilege.

At first I was thinking it would be interesting to try an unplugged thing, because no one's ever heard B.B. play an acoustic. I also

TOP KING BACKSTAGE AT THE WINTERLAND, SAN FRANCISCO, DECEMBER 1967. BELOW CLAPTON AND KING INTRODUCING ROCK AND ROLL HALL OF FAME INDUCTEE BUDDY GUY AT HIS INDUCTION CEREMONY, NEW YORK CITY, MARCH 14, 2005

TOP: © BARON WOLMAN / RETNA; BOTTOM: TIMOTHY A. CLARY/AFP/GETTY IMAGES

KING AND CLAPTON AT CAFE AU GO GO, NEW YORK CITY, 1967

MICHAEL OCHS/GETTY IMAGES

thought we could do something contemporary—get modern material and try a hip-hop–oriented thing. Another idea was just to amass a really great group of musicians and record live on the floor. And this studio, I felt, had a really good kind of atmosphere for live recording. In the end, we actually touched all those bases. But for me, it came alive when we were all live on the floor.

The sound of the album came primarily from the main microphone—the one that hung over all of us. Everything was miked close, too, but most of it was leaking, and all the instruments were bleeding into each other, so that overhead mic was the main mic. It was a sound we all immediately liked, so most of the tracks are live and done in two or three takes. And then it would be done. You couldn't really punch in, or change parts later because all the parts were bleeding together.

> "UNTIL WE STARTED WORKING ON THIS PROJECT, I NEVER REALIZED THE SIZE OF ERIC'S TALENT AND HOW SHARP HIS MIND IS."
> —B.B. KING

But when you have all these great musicians together, that's just the way they usually work. They need one take to kind of get the feel, then they get their focus on the second one, and then on the third pass it's done.

GW Whose idea was it to revamp some of the older standard blues?

CLAPTON Well, it was my idea, and I just wanted to go back as far as we could go. But there was no big master plan. It was very spontaneous. Each time we'd finish a song, I would just think, Well, what could come after this? So, it was recorded almost chronologically, the whole process. When it came to sharing the singing duties, I mean, I knew there were some things I should just stay away from, but I just wanted to have some vocals on it. I consider myself to be just a journeyman singer.

KING Oh, come on!

CLAPTON An amateur.

KING This guy sings like he was born down below Mississippi. [*laughs*] Oh, gosh. But you're right. It seems to me that when we started, everything just came together. As Eric said, we didn't plan anything, but Eric's mind was like a library. He would just bring up dozens of song ideas, and we would talk about them. When they were the right ideas, it seemed like you could hear them completed in your head.

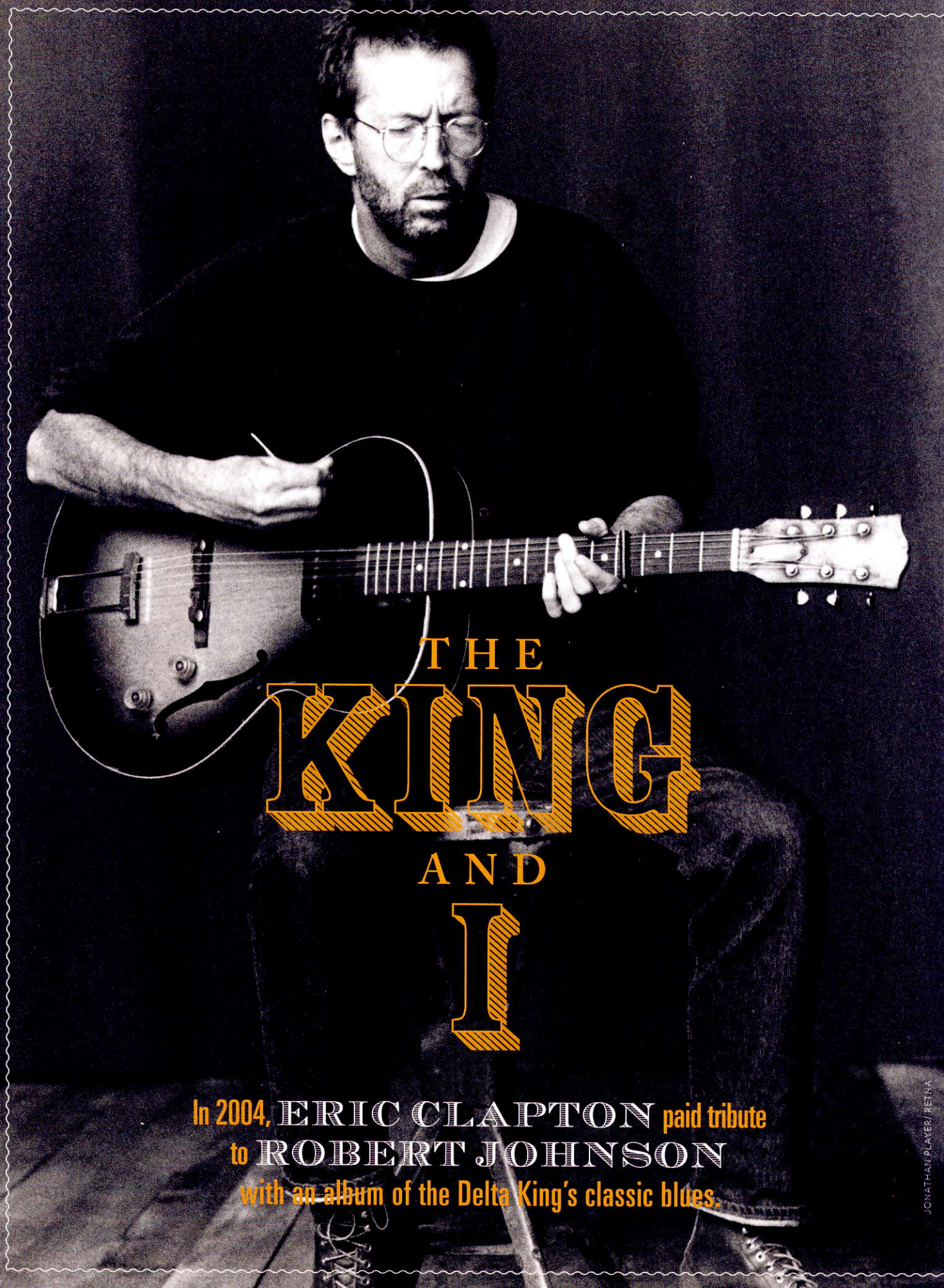
GW Big stadium tour next?

CLAPTON I can't keep up with him. I need to go and have a rest.

KING Well, my fingers are crossed again, hoping that maybe one day we can do a few cities together.

CLAPTON Yeah, that would be good. I think if there's a will, there's a way, and that will be the next thing to do. But B.B.'s schedule is so intense.

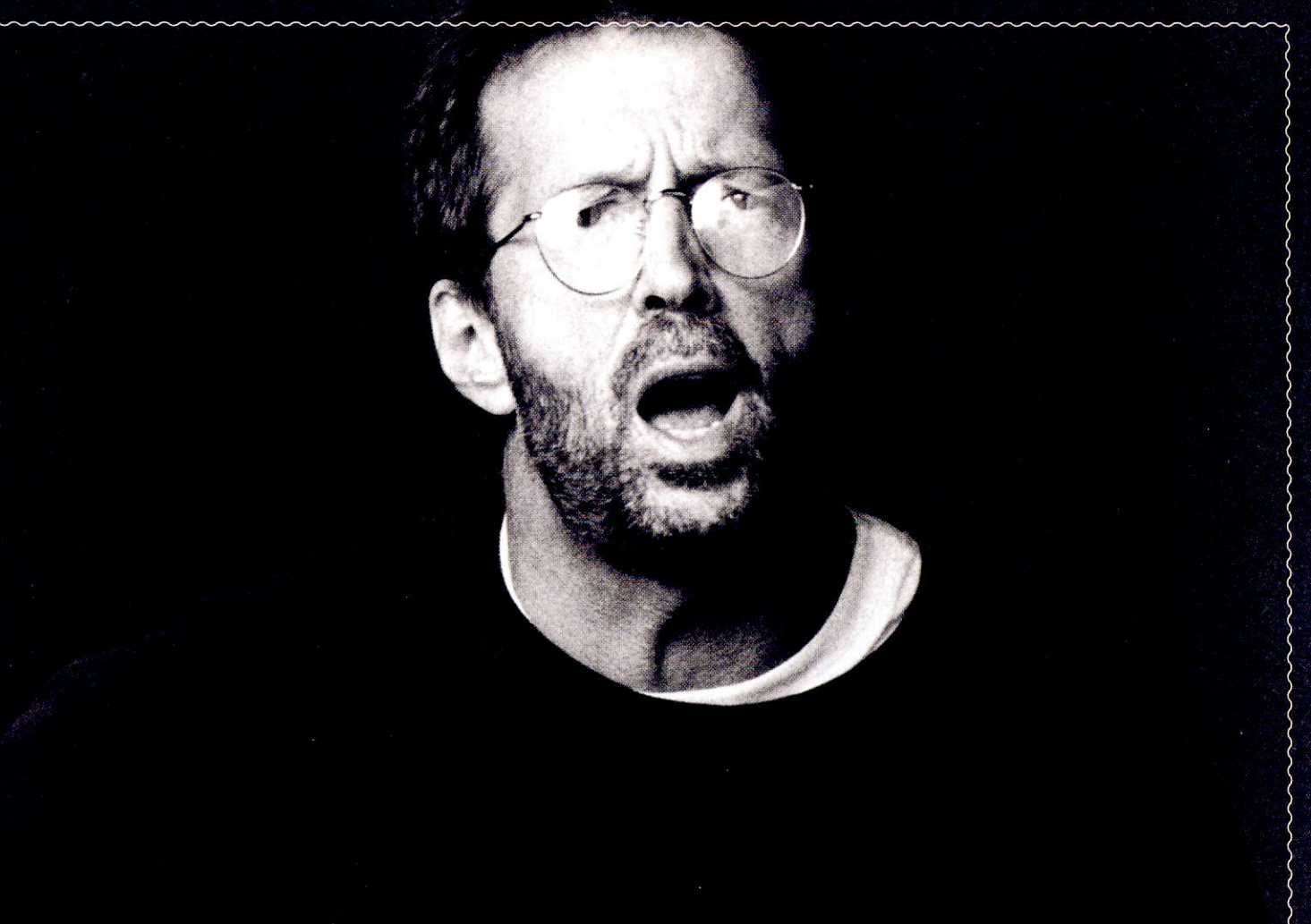
KING Well, I enjoy working, but if this guy was in Timbuktu and said, "B.B., come over," I would go. GL



THE KING AND I

In 2004, ERIC CLAPTON paid tribute to ROBERT JOHNSON with an album of the Delta King's classic blues.

JONATHAN PLAYER/RETNA



BY
HAROLD STEINBLATT

Reprinted from Guitar World
Acoustic, *June/July 2004*

69
GUITAR LEGENDS #97

BACK WHEN HE was a blues-obsessed teenager in England, something happened to Eric Clapton that caused him to fall down on his knees and ask the Lord above for mercy: he heard, for the first time, the music of Delta blues king Robert Johnson. Throughout his long and brilliant career, Clapton has often revisited that early encounter, likening it to "a religious experience" that "called to me in my confusion." The depth and brutal honesty of Johnson's music, he has said, "seemed to echo something that I had always felt."

ABOVE ONE OF TWO PHOTOS OF ROBERT JOHNSON KNOWN TO EXIST

Not surprisingly, the emotions triggered in him by Johnson's music also frightened Clapton a bit. "I could take the music only in small measures because it was so intense," he recalls. Clapton immersed himself in the music but was also seduced by the Johnson mystique: the claim that he sold his soul to the devil in exchange for his musical prowess, the mysterious circumstances surrounding his death at the age of 27, and the lack, at the time, of even one photograph of the blues great. Clapton's identification with Johnson was total, and not always benign: he admits, for instance, that he looked forward to dying in his late twenties.

Fortunately, as he battled and

ultimately triumphed over his own well-publicized personal demons, Clapton came to focus more on the music than the mystique—on the Johnson who was "the best guitarist I ever heard," the Johnson whose songs expressed "every angle of emotion."

In 2004, Clapton at long last paid tribute to the great bluesman with the album *Me and Mr. Johnson*, an electric affair that featured brilliant guitar work by Clapton, his longtime collaborator Andy Fairweather-Low and Doyle Bramhall II. In the following interview, the Prince of the British Blues graciously consented to spin a verbal riff on the subject of his King.

GUITAR WORLD ACOUSTIC So you've finally taken the plunge and recorded an album of songs by Robert Johnson.

ERIC CLAPTON Yes. I realized that if I didn't do it now I probably never would. What made it possible for me to do it in the first place was that I was no longer driven by any need to somehow match, or compete, with the originals. Also, the fact is that I'm very comfortable now in a way that I'd never been before. I think the primacy of my wife and children in my life had a lot to do with that.

GWA It occurred to me that the very fact that the recordings on *Me and Mr. Johnson* differ so completely from Johnson's own arrangements indicate a certain comfort level you had about the entire project.

CLAPTON That's very true.

GWA I understand that your comfort in doing the material made it possible for you to record the material with a band. But why did you choose to not record any of the songs on *Me and Mr. Johnson* solo acoustic, just you and your guitar?

CLAPTON I actually tried to do "Terraplane Blues" solo acoustic, and it just sounded weak. There was no point in doing a second-rate version of a Robert Johnson song.

GWA When did you learn to play his music on the acoustic guitar?

CLAPTON To tell you the truth, I never really did; I have never actually sat down and played Robert Johnson unaccompanied. Even when I played "Malted Milk" on *Unplugged*, I did it as a duet with Andy Fairweather-Low. I can play pieces of Robert Johnson songs but not entire tunes note for note. I can play Big Bill Broonzy's stuff, but there's something very symmetrical about his music: once you learn the fingerpicking pattern, it's easy. But Robert's music is so asymmetrical, and there is always something new going on. I find it very difficult to play by myself.

GWA Johnson's impact on you is well documented. I remember reading that as a young guitarist you often turned your back to your audiences when it came time to play a solo, and that this was associated with your obsession with Johnson.

CLAPTON I don't know if this is true or not, but it was reported by Don Law, the man who recorded him, that prior to one of his sessions there were some Mexican musicians in the room with him. It seems he was unable to play in front of them; he had to turn and play to the corner of the room. When I read this I thought, That makes sense. How could he play in front of other people when he's exposing his emotions so entirely?

GWA When you first discovered Robert Johnson, very little was known about him; he was a mysterious, romantic figure. Within the past three decades, however, two photos of Johnson were unearthed and blues scholars have learned much more about his life. Has that in some way diminished him in your eyes?

CLAPTON No, not at all. The music, which I digested and placed in a certain location a long, long time ago, is in a very safe place in my heart and mind. I could watch a documentary about his life with a great deal of interest, but it would have absolutely no effect on what I gathered from the music, then or now.

GWA Some revisionist blues historians have downplayed Johnson's influence as a blues artist, maintaining that his importance was a creation of his later, white audience. Others point out that much of his material was actually derived from previous work by bluesmen like Son House, Lonnie Johnson and Kokomo Arnold. What's your view?

CLAPTON I recently read Elijah Wald's *Escaping the Delta: Robert Johnson and the Invention of the*

DELTA HAZE

Blues, and he made what I thought were some pretty rash statements. One was that Robert could have been removed from the picture and nothing much would've been affected. I thought that was an extraordinarily hasty thing to say, and I'll explain why: Before I heard Robert Johnson, I had already been exposed to a lot of rhythm and blues artists like Chuck Berry and Jimmy Reed. As soon as I heard Johnson play boogie on things like "When You Got a Good Friend" and "Rambling on My Mind," I immediately understood where a lot of R&B grooves originated. No one else from that period—not Son House, not Charlie Patton, not Blind Lemon Jefferson—played anything like that. I think that was Robert Johnson's invention, which is a considerable contribution to the blues, and it enabled me to make a direct connection from Robert Johnson to Jimmy Reed.

GWA I once read of a guitarist who described Johnson as a "one-man power trio" because of his penchant for simultaneously playing a bass line, a rhythm part on the middle strings and a lead riff on the treble strings, all while singing the song.

CLAPTON Yes, it was a natural thing for him to do, and I think that's also his invention. You mention that while playing a line on the low strings he would simultaneously pick little reference notes on the high strings, something he does on "When You Got a Good Friend," which we recorded on *Me and Mr. Johnson*. Well, Freddie King used to do that all the time, and I've heard countless electric guitar players do that. It was like Johnson was playing electric guitar before there were electric guitars; that's the bizarre thing. And while I accept that he was a product of influences like Lonnie Johnson and Kokomo Arnold, I don't think anyone summed up the whole Delta blues experience in the way—or had the impact—that he did.

GWA What would you say distinguishes Robert's playing from that of his Delta bluesman peers?

CLAPTON He had finesse! I heard Johnson before I heard Son House and Charley Patton, and people kept telling me I had to check them out. When I did, my first reaction was, Whoa, these guys are kind of noisy; they're kind of clanky! "Clumsy" is probably too harsh a word. But then I'd go back to Robert and think, There's no comparison, this guy's got finesse. His touch was extraordinary; it was so refined, which is amazing in light of the fact that he was simultaneously singing with such intensity.

GWA It must have been thrilling for you when, as a member of the Yardbirds, you played with Sonny Boy Williamson II, who reputedly knew Johnson quite well. Did you ever ask him about Robert?

CLAPTON No, partly because we became enemies on the first day we met. I went up to him and asked, "Isn't your name really Rice Miller?" Of course, his name really was Rice Miller. I must've come off like some naïve blues collector. And our relationship never recovered after that. I think he thought I was making fun of him. Sonny Boy was a very difficult and strange man.

GWA Did you actually learn anything from this "difficult and strange" bluesman?

CLAPTON While we didn't get along, he did make me realize how important it was to pay attention to detail in the blues. For example, the Yardbirds would be rehearsing with him, he would call out one of his songs—like "Nine Below Zero"—and we would start playing. Suddenly, he would stop and say, "That's not how you play it." And the other guys in the band would say, "What do you mean—it's a blues, isn't it?" But I had heard the record and knew that there was actually an intro, a motif, a balance of who played what, and that we weren't playing those things correctly. I suddenly became aware through working with him that even though you had this general thing called "the blues," each song had its own identity and had to be rehearsed and respected. We were very young and just didn't know any better. The truth is he had every right to be upset. We were supposed to be playing his hit songs and we just didn't learn them properly. I would not be very happy myself if I was playing with a bunch of musicians who didn't bother to learn all the parts to my songs.

GWA Is there anything else about Robert or his music that you didn't get in your youth but which you now understand?

CLAPTON God, you stumped me. I don't think there's anything I understand more about him now than I did then. I may be a little more comfortable playing his music now, because it's very much part of who I am, but that's about it. When I was a teenager, I could take the music only in very small measures because it was so intense. But do I grasp it any better? I'd have to say that I don't: it's as mysterious to me now as it ever was. I still don't know how he did some of that stuff. Take "Kindhearted Woman Blues": there's an instance in one of the verses, on a IV chord, where he plays an odd single-note kind of accompaniment behind the vocal. I can't do it—I can't see how anybody could do it. [*laughs*]

GWA Once the greatest, always the greatest.

CLAPTON No question about it. GL

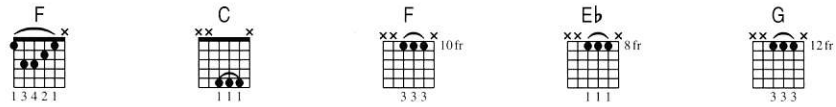
LEFT ONSTAGE CIRCA 1977

CHRIS WALTER

"ROBERT'S MUSIC IS AS MYSTERIOUS TO ME NOW AS IT EVER WAS. I STILL DON'T KNOW HOW HE DID SOME OF THAT STUFF."

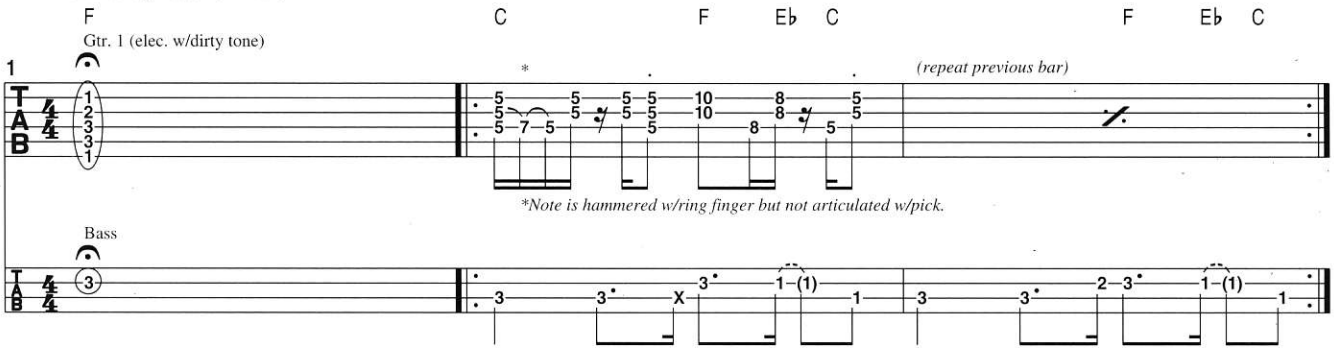
"AFTER MIDNIGHT" ERIC CLAPTON

As heard on **ERIC CLAPTON** (POLYDOR)
Words and Music by **J. J. Cale** • *Transcribed by* **Jeff Perrin**



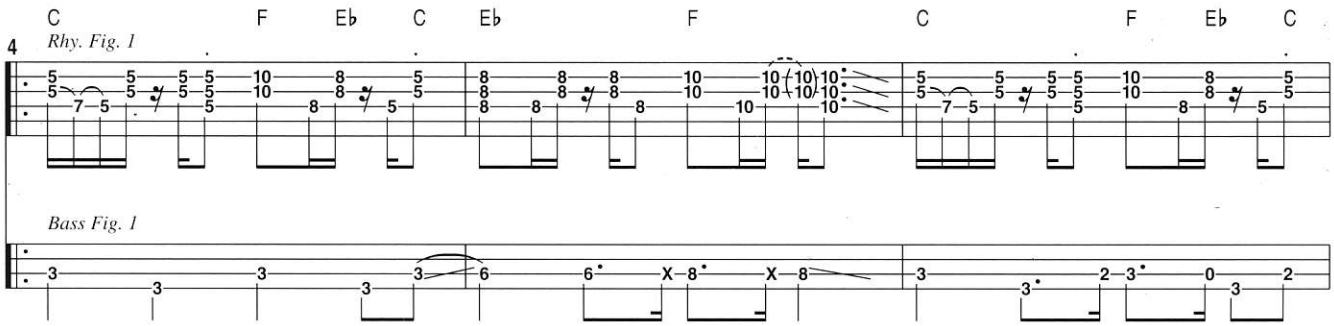
A **Intro** (0:00)

Moderately Fast ♩ = 126



B **Verses** (0:11, 0:44, 1:48)

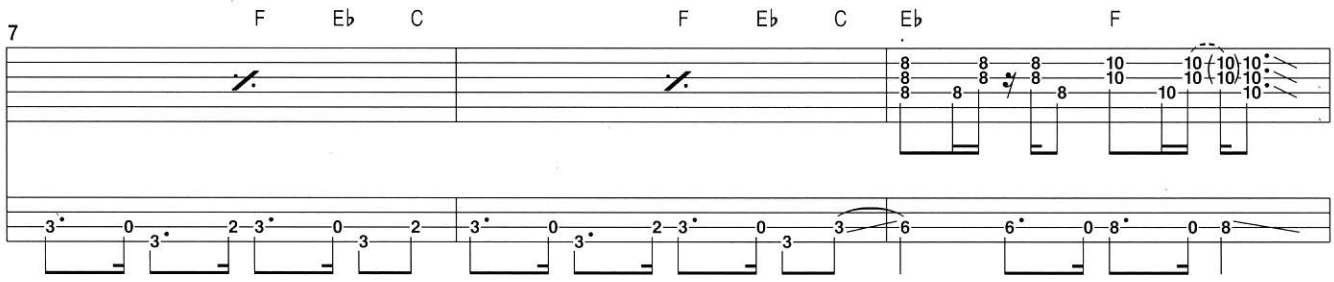
1. After midnight we're gonna let it all hang down
2., 3. After midnight we're gonna shake your tambourine (After midnight)
(3rd time) (Gonna shake your tambourine)



(After midnight)
(Gonna shake your tambourine)

After midnight
After midnight

we're gonna chug-a-lug and
it's all gonna be peaches



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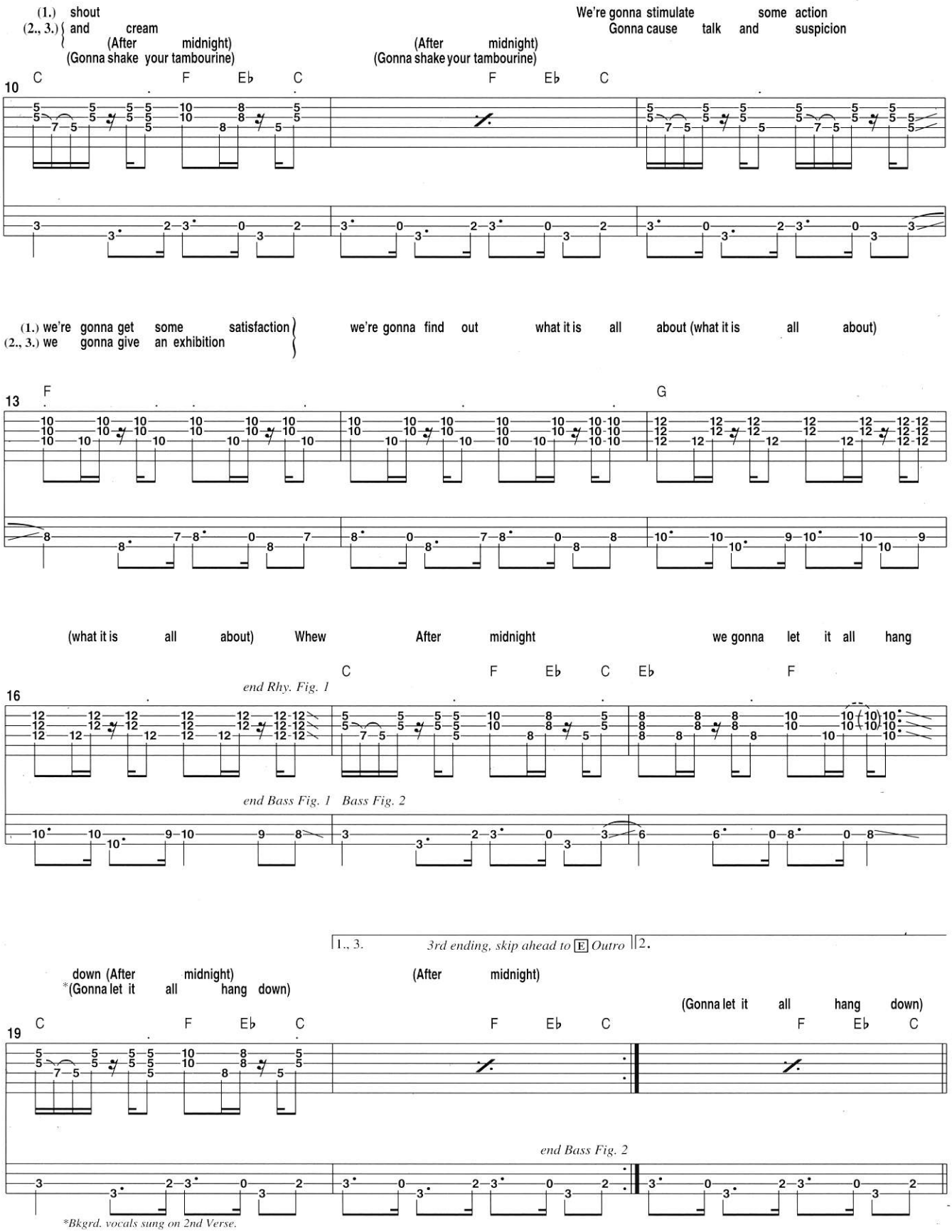
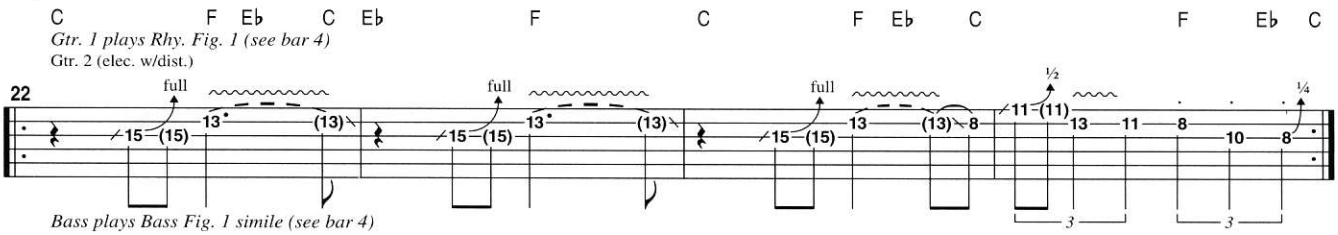
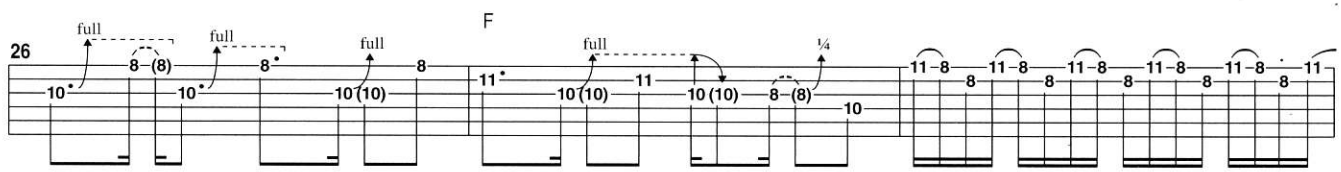

*Bkgrd. vocals sung on 2nd Verse.

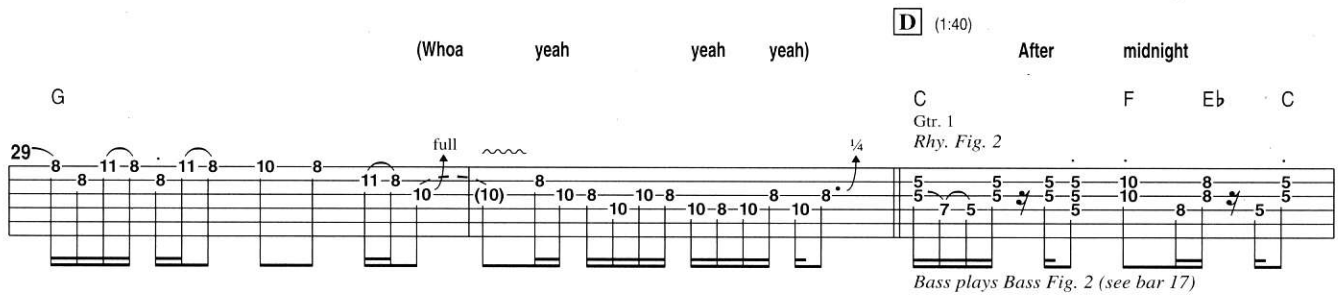
"AFTER MIDNIGHT"

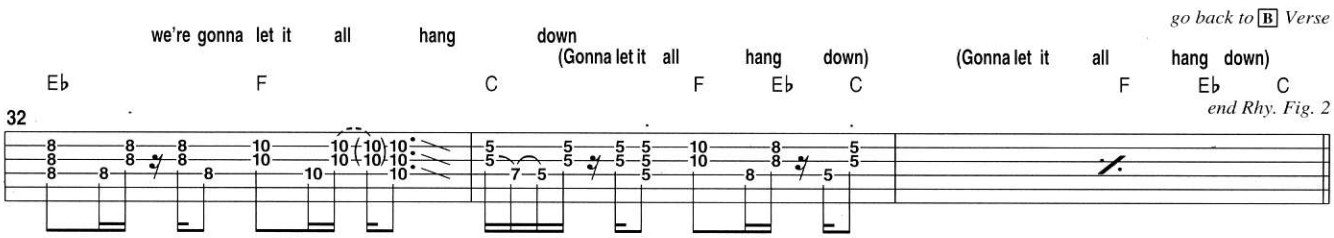
C Guitar Solo (1:16)

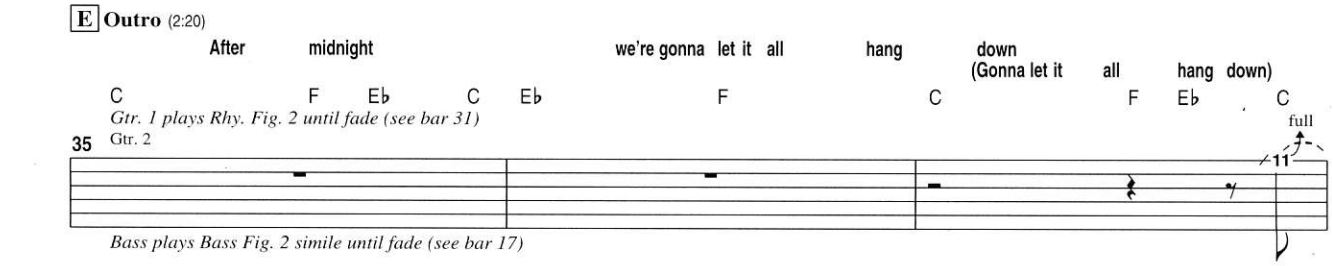
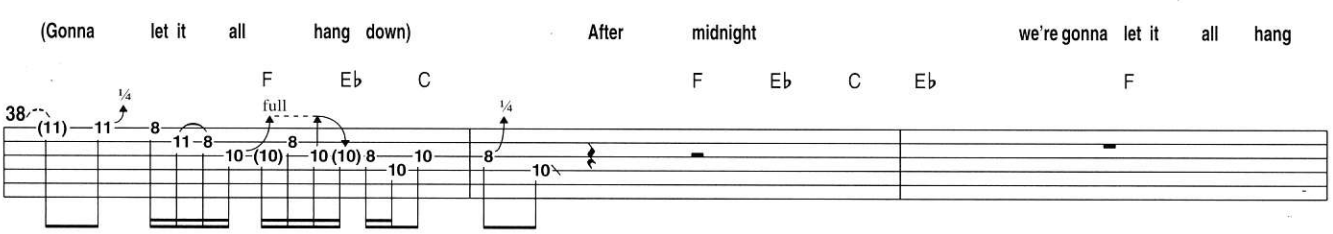


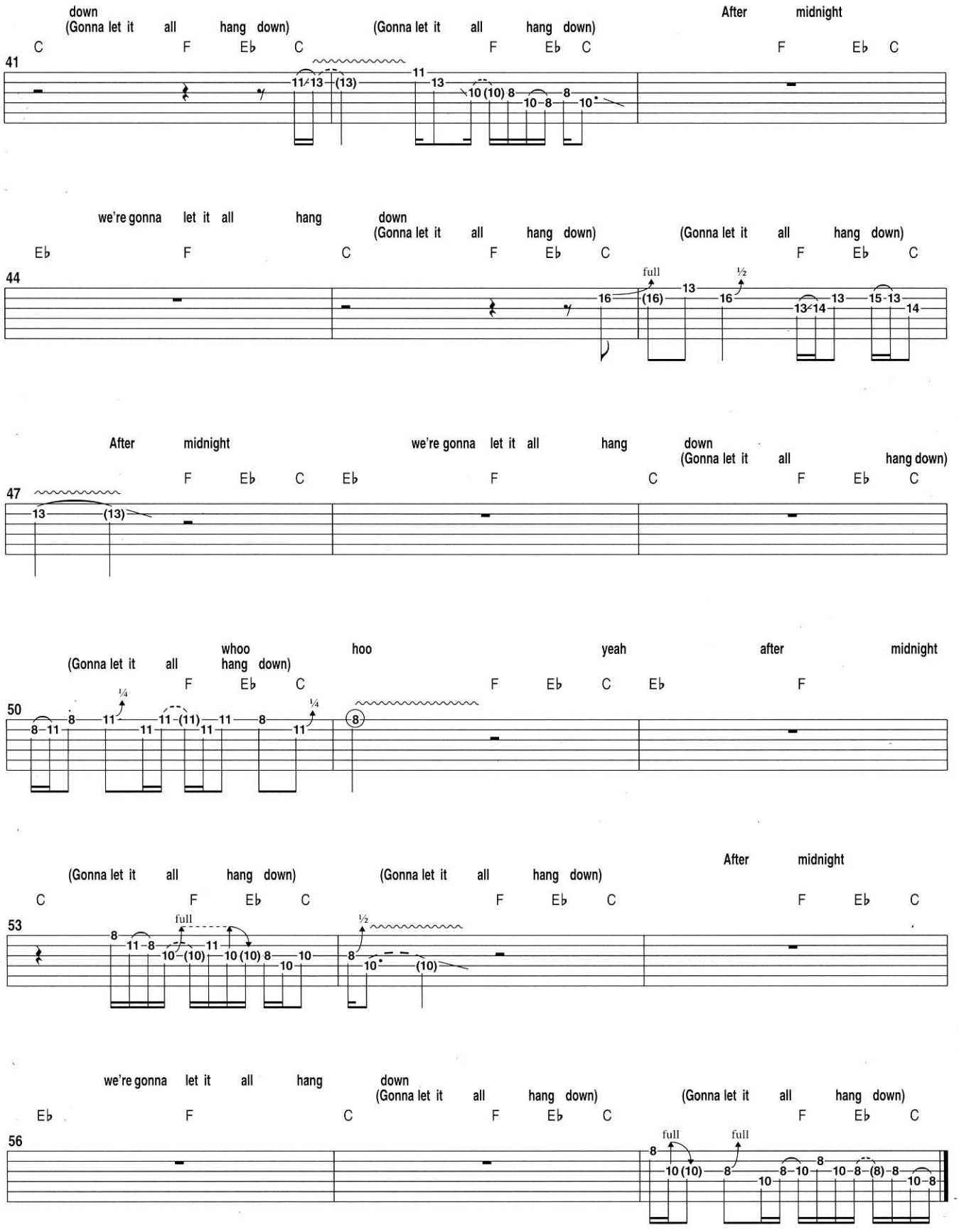


D (1:40)



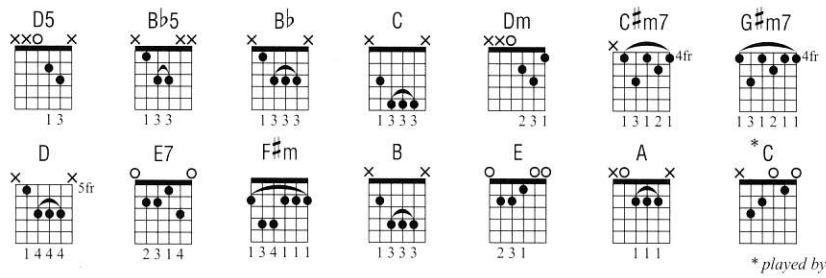


E Outro (2:20)




down
(Gonna let it all hang down)
(Gonna let it all hang down)
After midnight
C F E♭ C F E♭ C F E♭ C
41
we're gonna let it all hang down
(Gonna let it all hang down)
(Gonna let it all hang down)
E♭ F C F E♭ C F E♭ C
44
full
½
After midnight
we're gonna let it all hang down
(Gonna let it all hang down)
F E♭ C E♭ F C F E♭ C
47
whoo hoo yeah after midnight
(Gonna let it all hang down)
F E♭ C F E♭ C E♭ F
50
¼
(Gonna let it all hang down)
(Gonna let it all hang down)
After midnight
C F E♭ C F E♭ C F E♭ C
53
full
½
we're gonna let it all hang down
(Gonna let it all hang down)
(Gonna let it all hang down)
E♭ F C F E♭ C F E♭ C
56
full
full

"LAYLA" ERIC CLAPTON

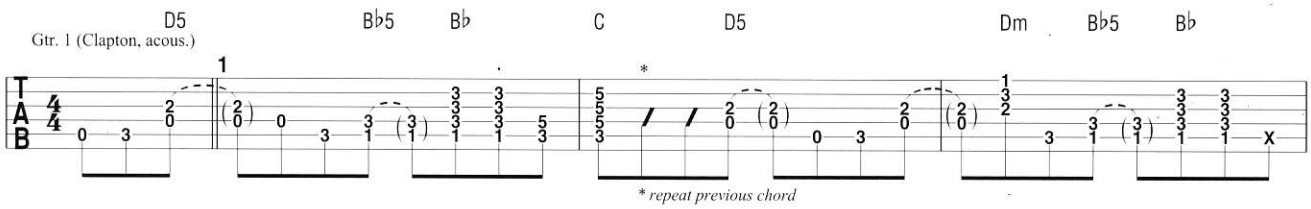
As heard on **UNPLUGGED** (REPRISE)
Words and Music by **Eric Clapton and Jim Gordon** • *Transcribed by* **Jeff Perrin**



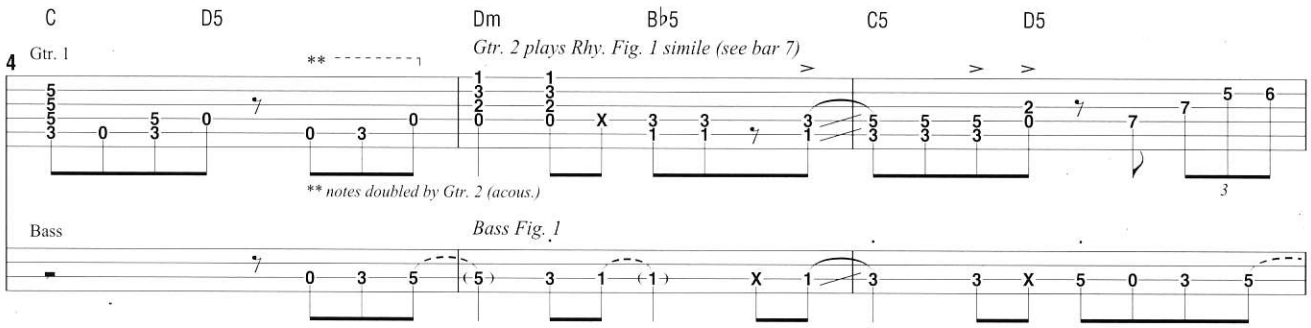
* played by Gtr. 2 only (see bar 22)

A **Intro** (0:02)

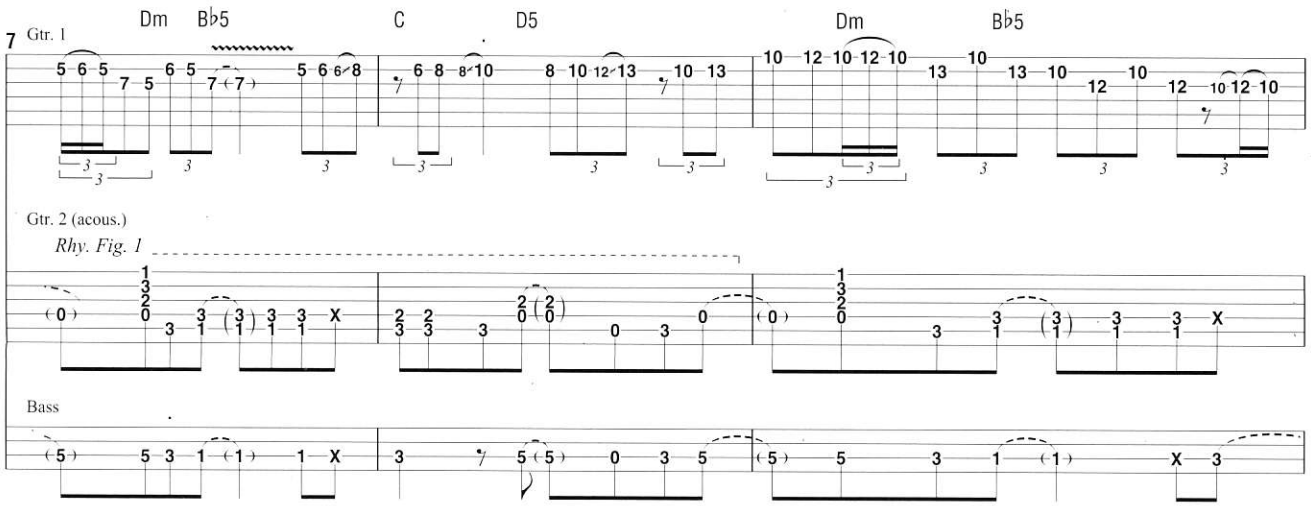
Moderately ♩ = 96 (♫ = ♩³♪)



* repeat previous chord



** notes doubled by Gtr. 2 (acous.)



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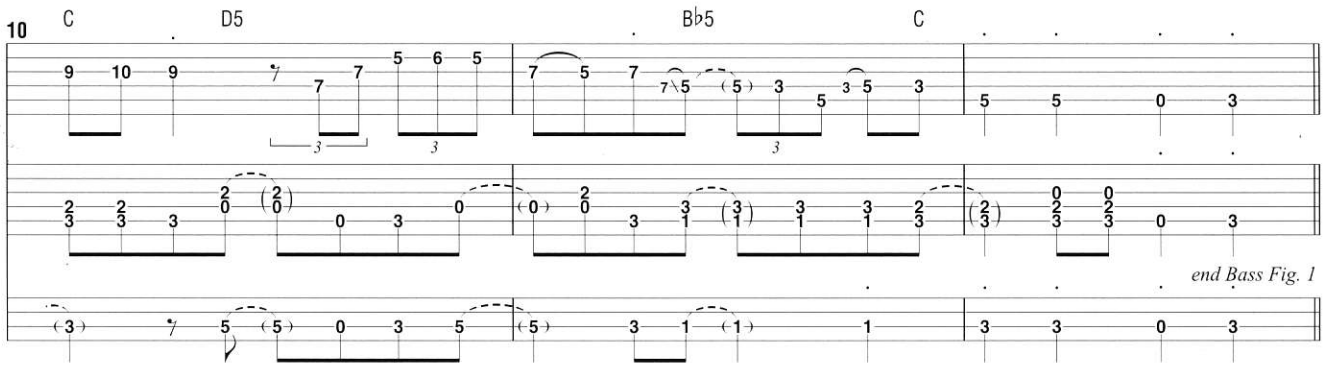
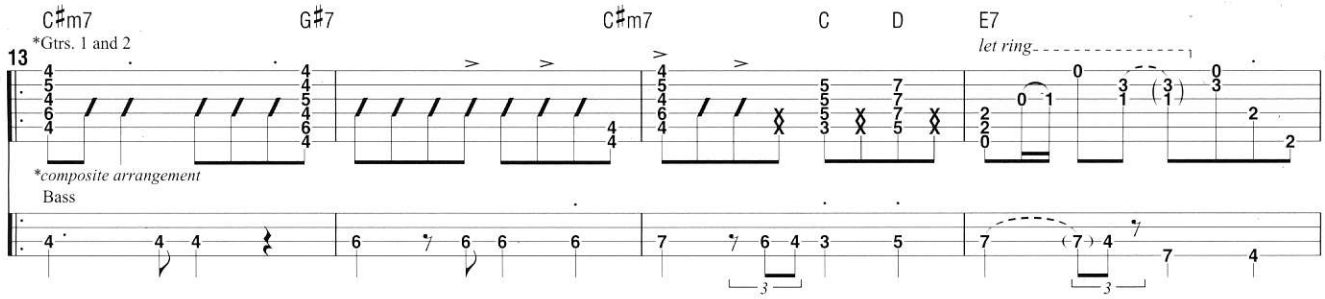


B **Verses** (0:34, 1:15, 1:56)

1. What will you do when you get lonely
2. I tried to give you consolation
3. Make the best of the situation

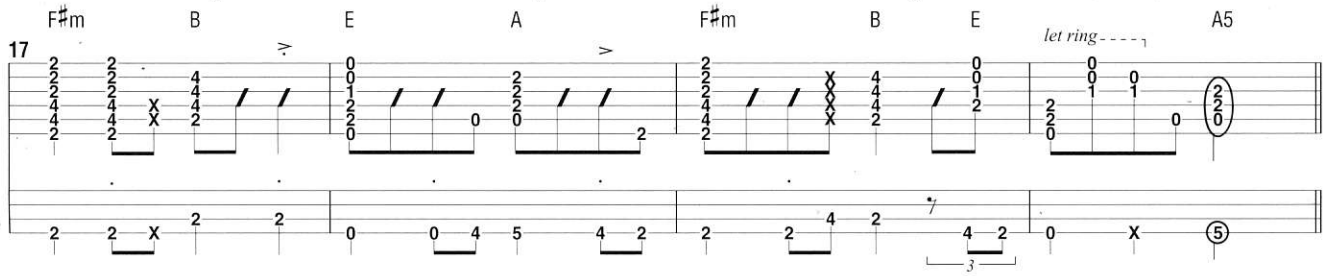
no one waiting by your side
Your old man he let you down
before I finally go insane



You've been runnin' and hidin' much too long
Like a fool I fell in love with you
Please don't say we'll never find a way

You know it's just your foolish pride
You turned my whole world upside down
Tell me all my love's in vain

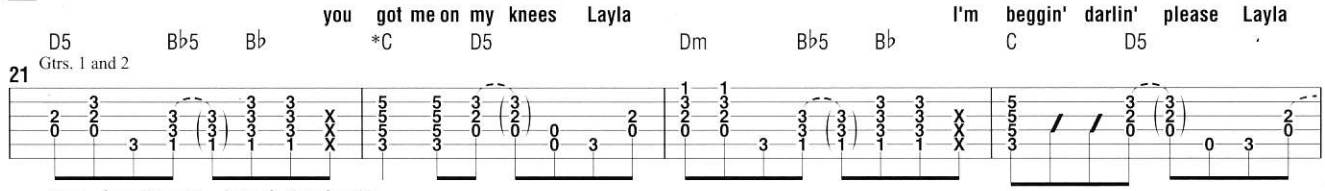
Layla



C **Chorus** (0:54, 1:36, 2:16)

you got me on my knees Layla

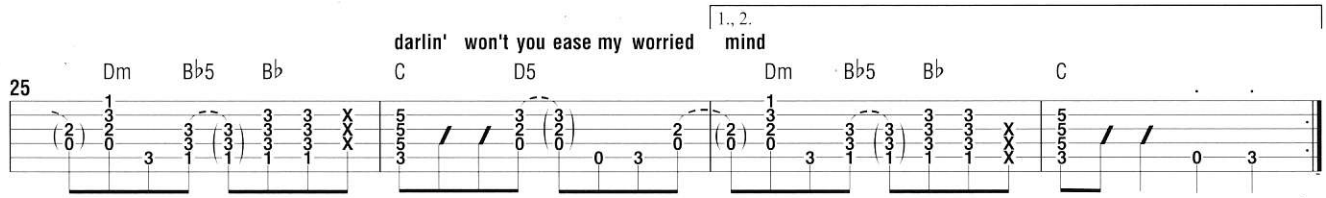
I'm beggin' darlin' please Layla

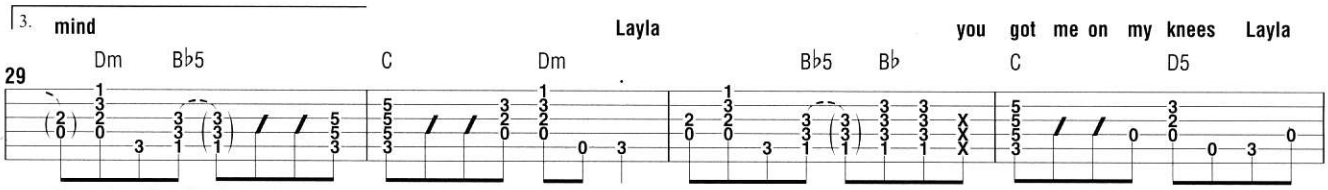


Bass plays Bass Fig. 1 simile (see bar 5)

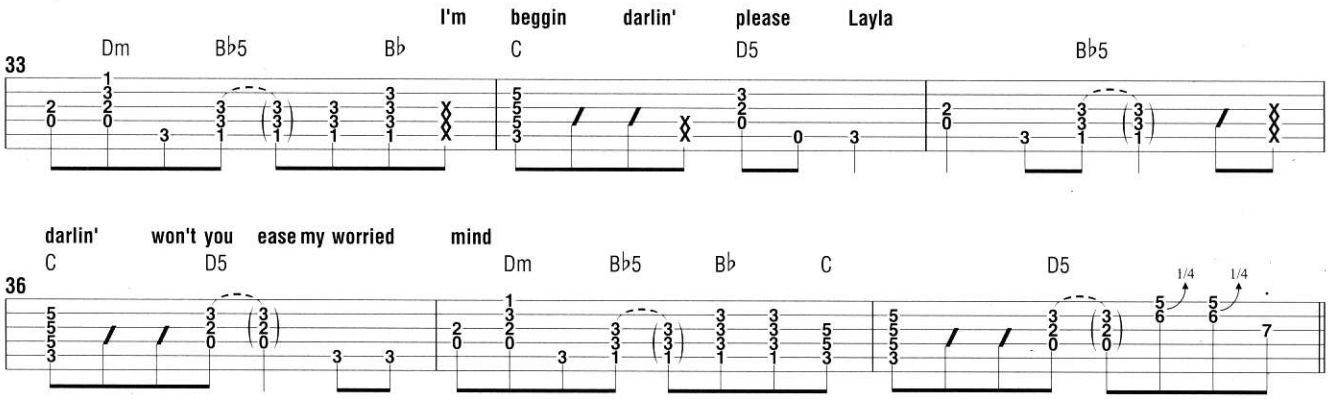
** Gtr. 2 substitutes open C chord throughout.*

darlin' won't you ease my worried mind

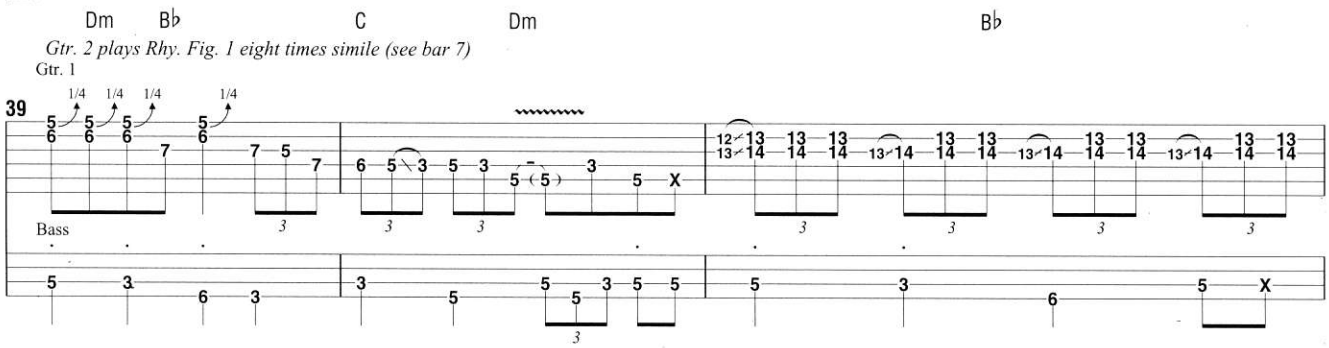


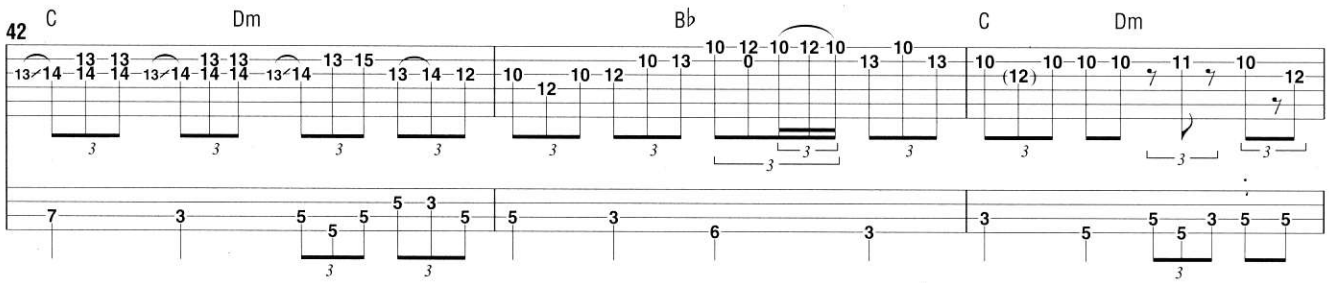


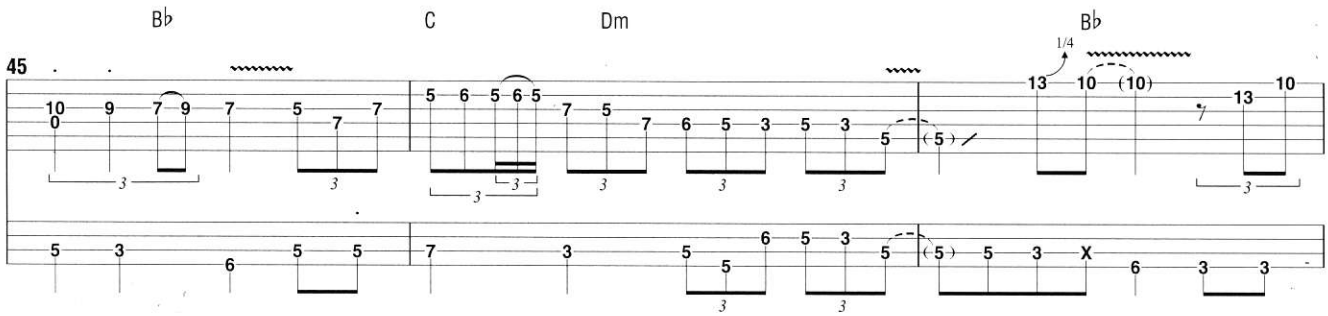
Bass plays first four bars of Bass Fig. 1 two and one half times simile (see bar 5)

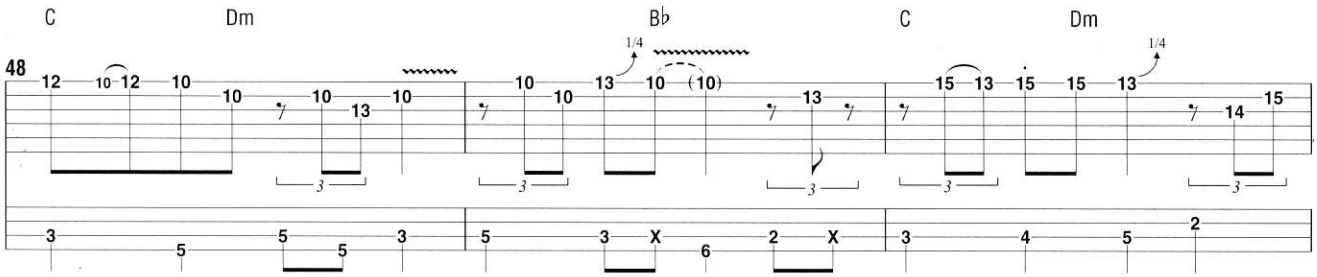


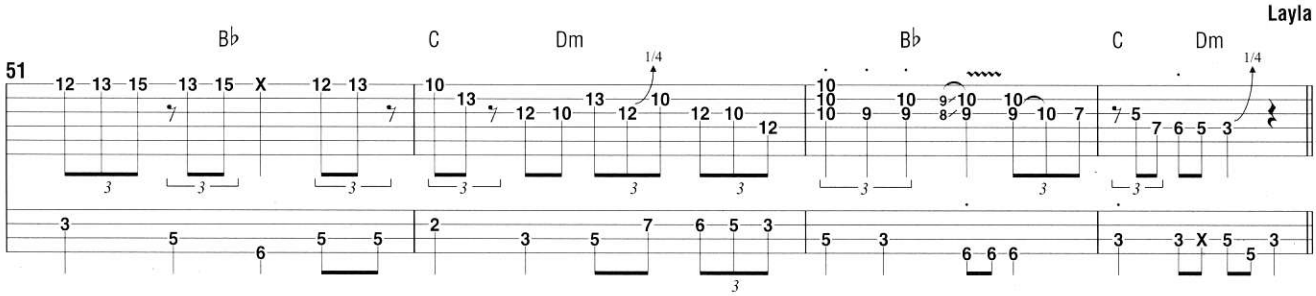
D **Guitar Solo** (2:57)









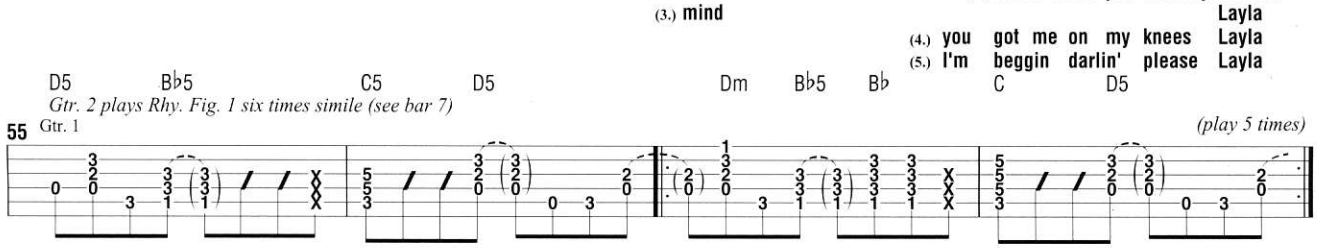


E **Outro Chorus** (3:36)

you got me on my knees Layla

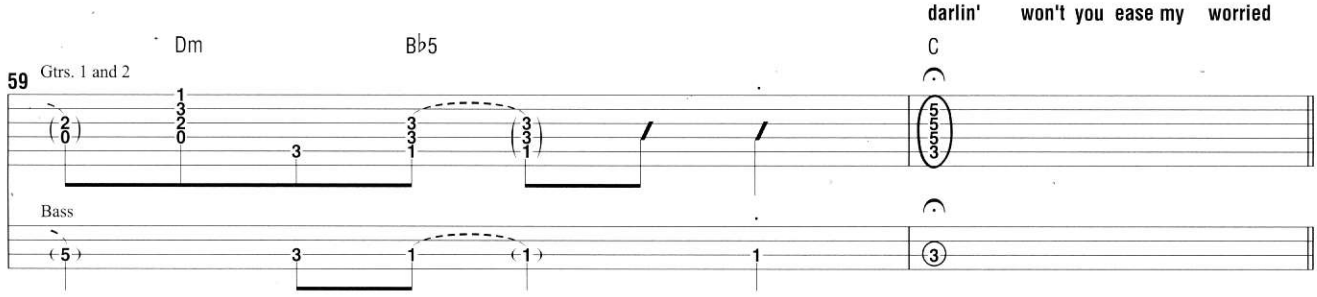
(3.) mind

(1.) I'm beggin' darlin' please Layla
(2.) darlin' won't you ease my worried Layla
(4.) you got me on my knees Layla
(5.) I'm beggin darlin' please Layla



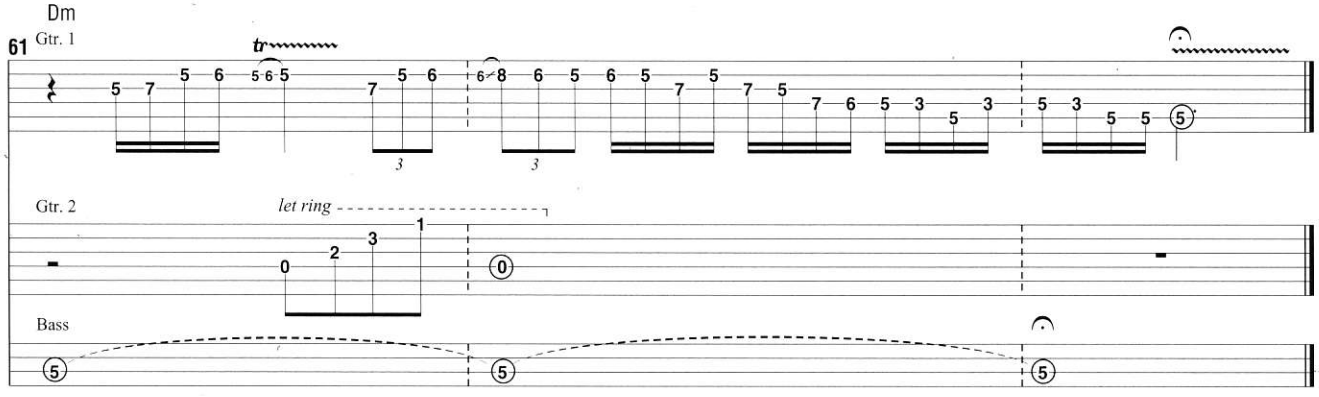
Gtr. 2 plays Rhy. Fig. 1 six times simile (see bar 7)

Bass plays first four bars of Bass Fig. 1 three times simile (see bar 5)



Freely (4:15)

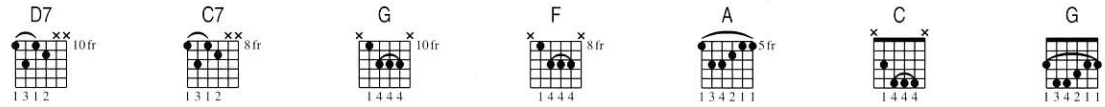
mind



"SUNSHINE OF YOUR LOVE" CREAM

As heard on **DISRAELI GEARS** (POLYDOR)

Words and Music by **Jack Bruce, Pete Brown and Eric Clapton** • *Transcribed by* **Jeff Perrin**

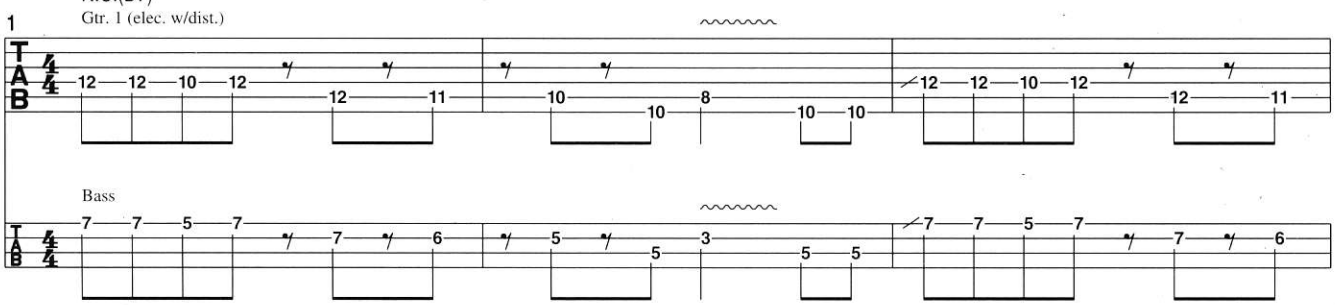


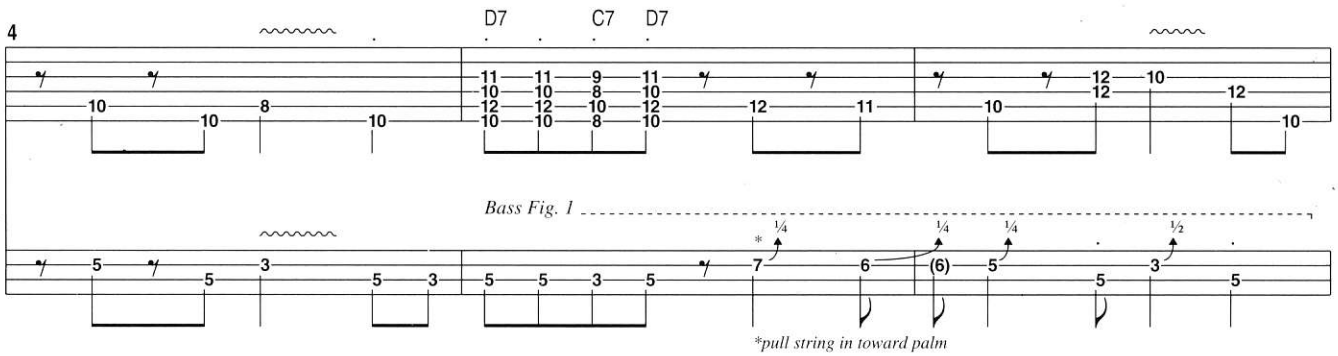
A **Intro** (0:00)

Moderately ♩ = 114

N.C.(D7)

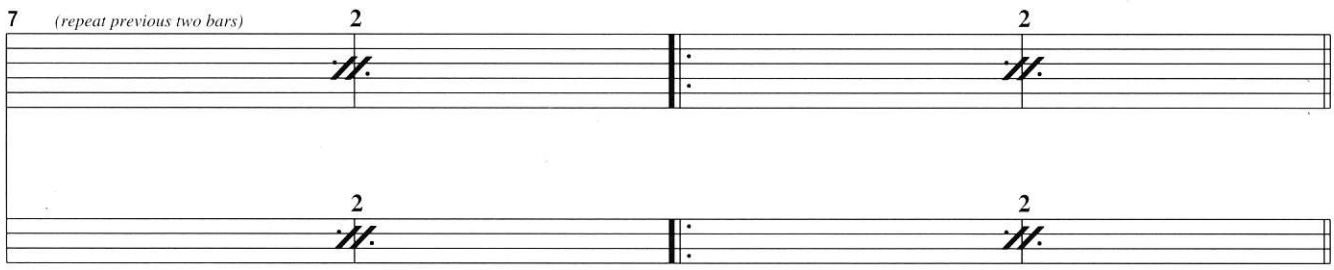
Gtr. 1 (elec. w/dist.)





B (1:07, 2:55)

1. It's
2., 3. I'm



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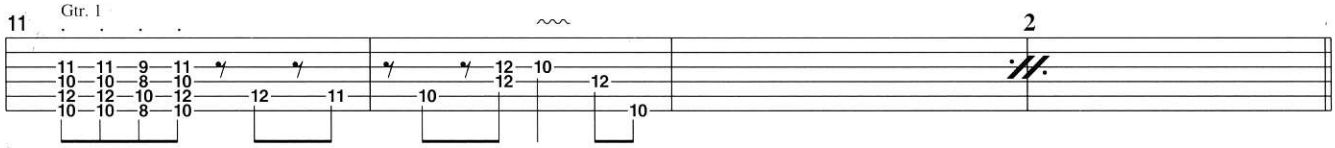
C Verses (0:17, 1:11, 2:59)

(1.) gettin' near dawn when lights close their tired eyes I'll
(2., 3.) with you my love the light's shining through on you Yes I'm

C7 D7 C7 D7

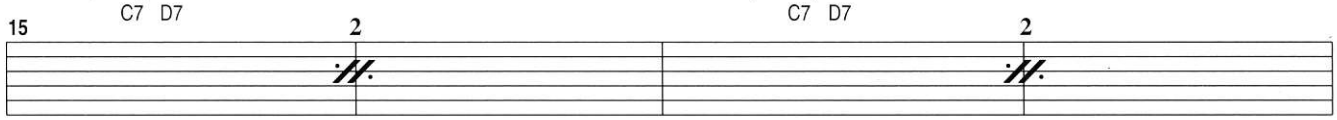
Gtr. 1



Bass plays Bass Fig. 1 four times (see bar 5)

soon be with you my love give you my dawn surprise I'll
with you my love It's the morning and just we two I'll

C7 D7 C7 D7

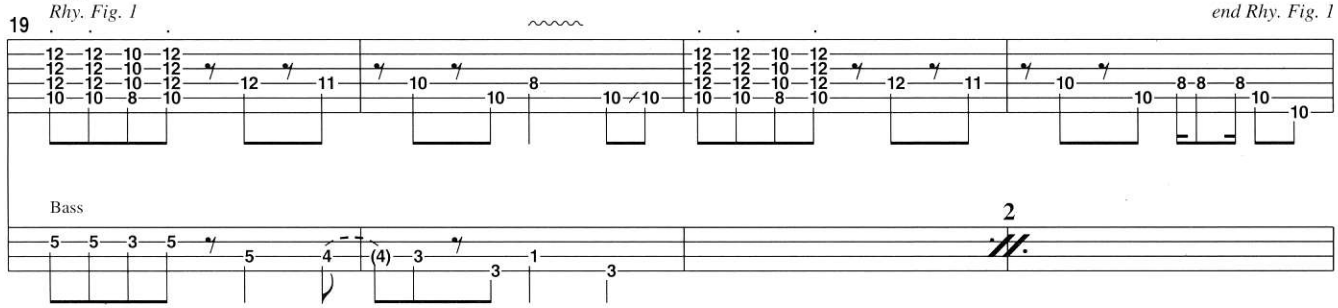


be with you darling soon I'll be with you when the stars start falling
stay with you darling now I'll stay with you 'til my seas are all dried up

G F G F G

Gtr. 1

Rhy. Fig. 1 *end Rhy. Fig. 1*



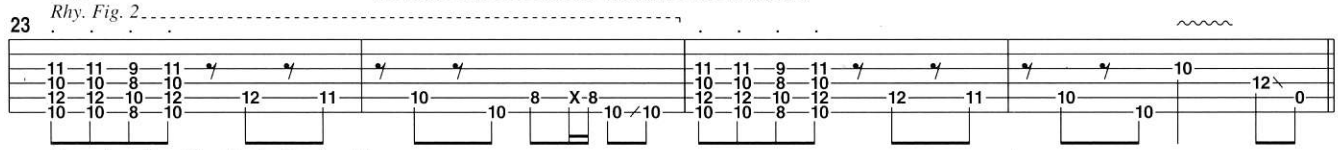
Bass

(3rd time) skip ahead to G Out-chorus

D7 C7 D7 C7 D7

Gtr. 1 *Substitute Fill 1 second and third times (see next page)*

Rhy. Fig. 2



Bass plays Bass Fig. 1 twice (see bar 5)

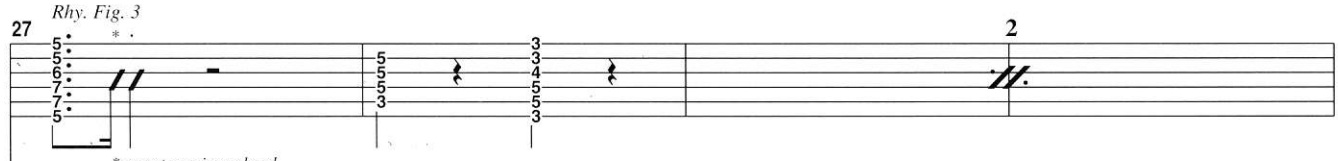
D Chorus (0:50, 1:44)

I've been waiting so long to be where I'm going

A C G

Gtr. 1

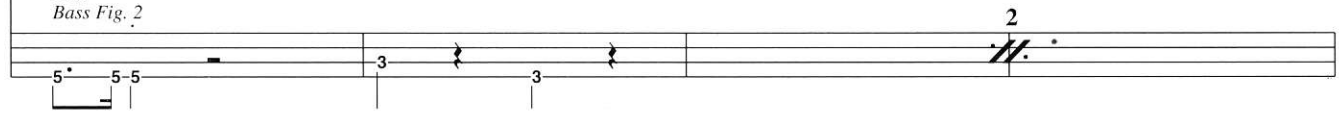
Rhy. Fig. 3



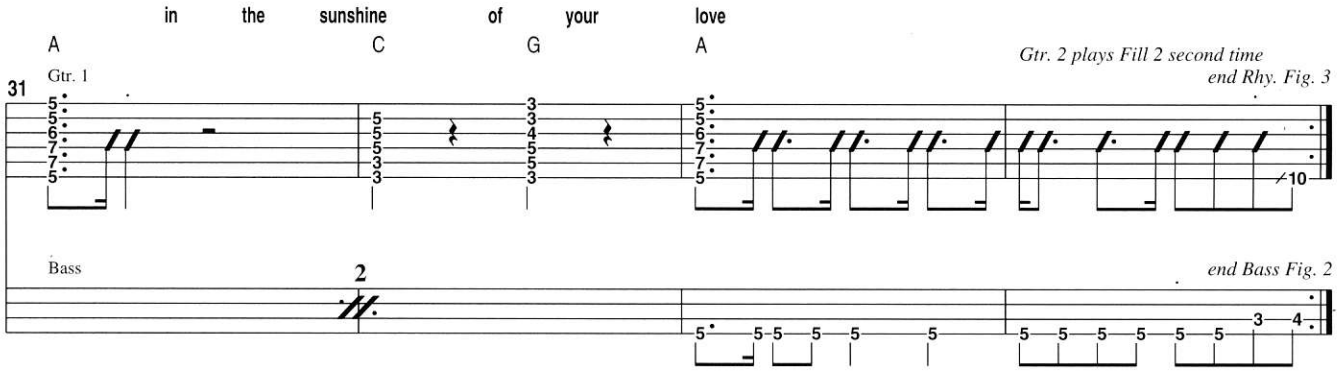
**repeat previous chord*

Bass

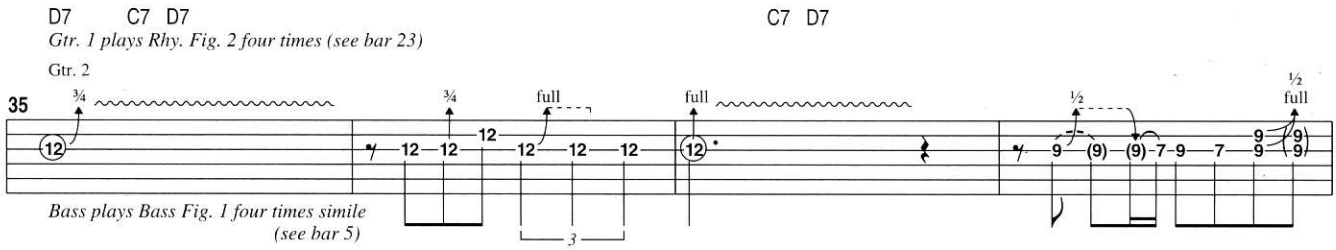
Bass Fig. 2

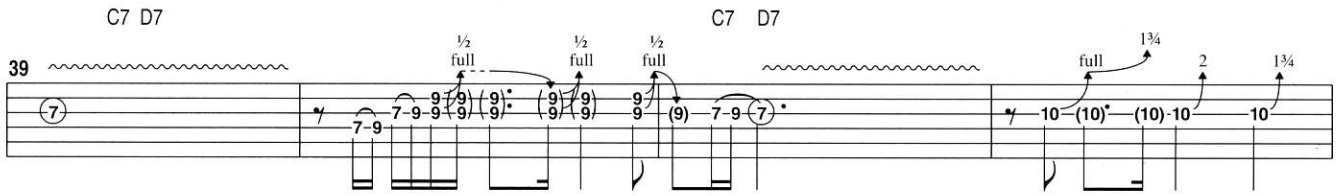


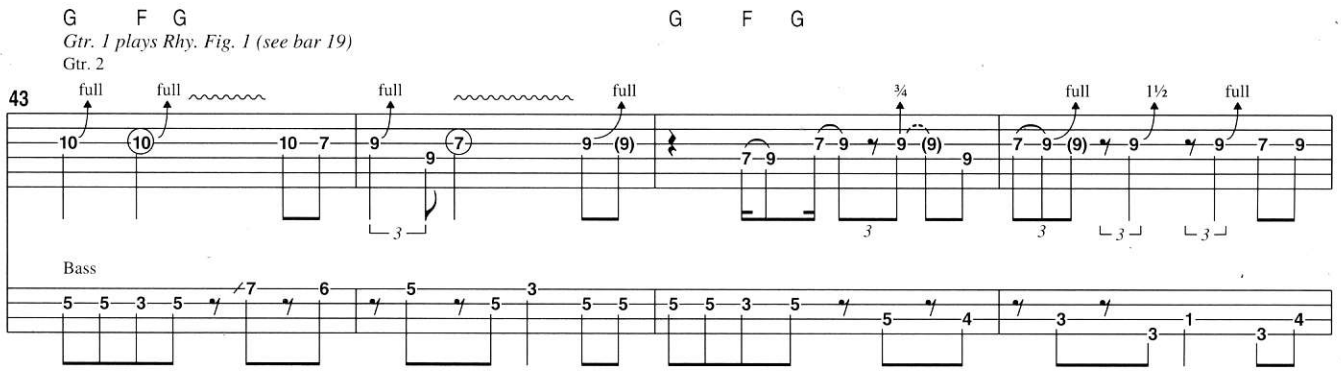
"SUNSHINE OF YOUR LOVE"

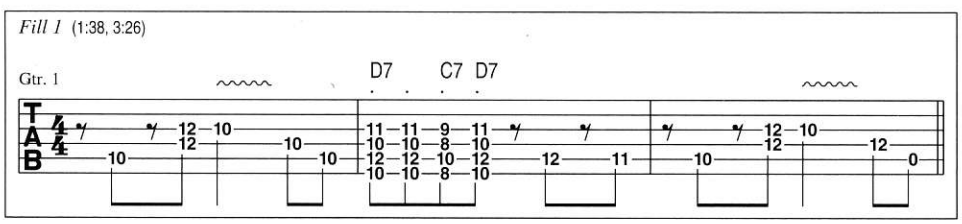


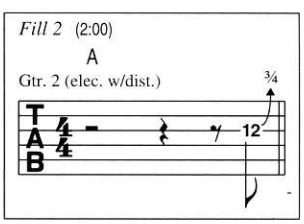
E **Guitar Solo** (2:01)

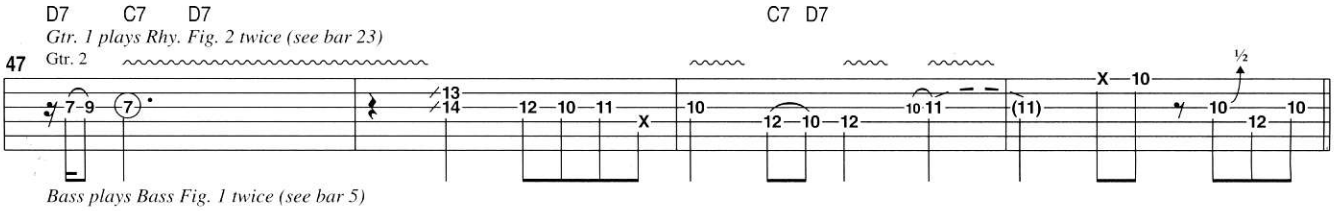


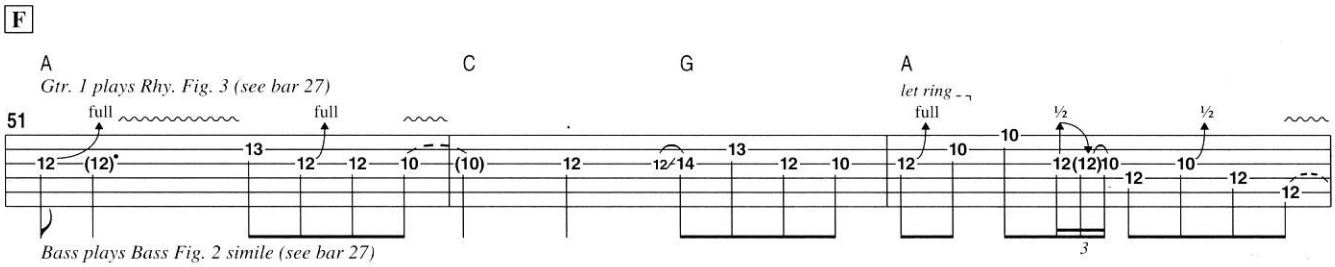


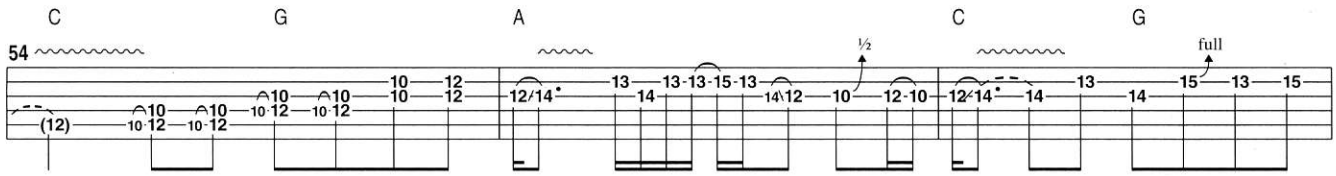


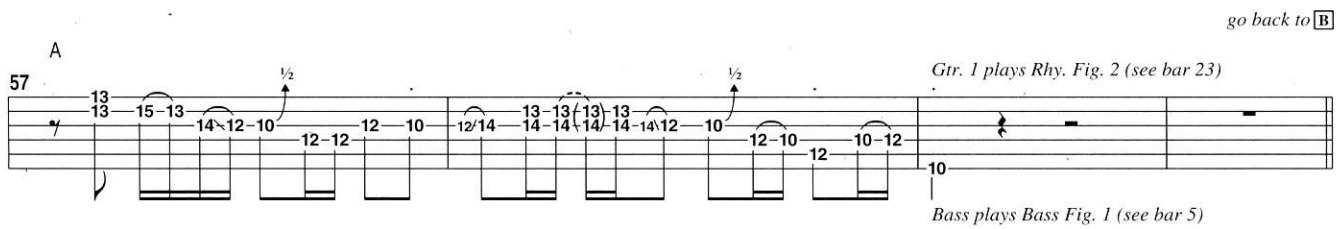






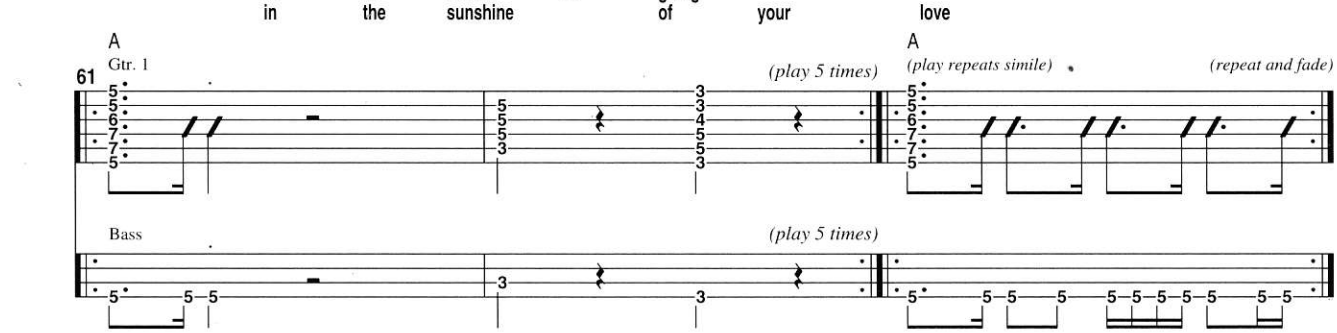






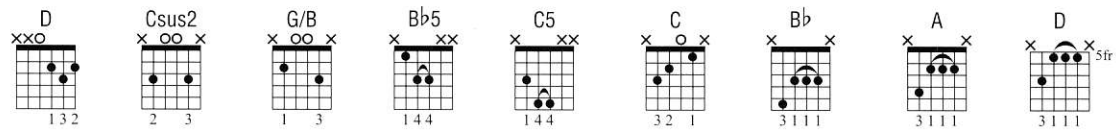
G Outro-chorus (3:32)

I've	been	waiting		so	long	
I've	been	waiting		so	long	
I've	been	waiting		so	long	
to	be	where	I'm	going		
in	the	sunshine		of	your	love



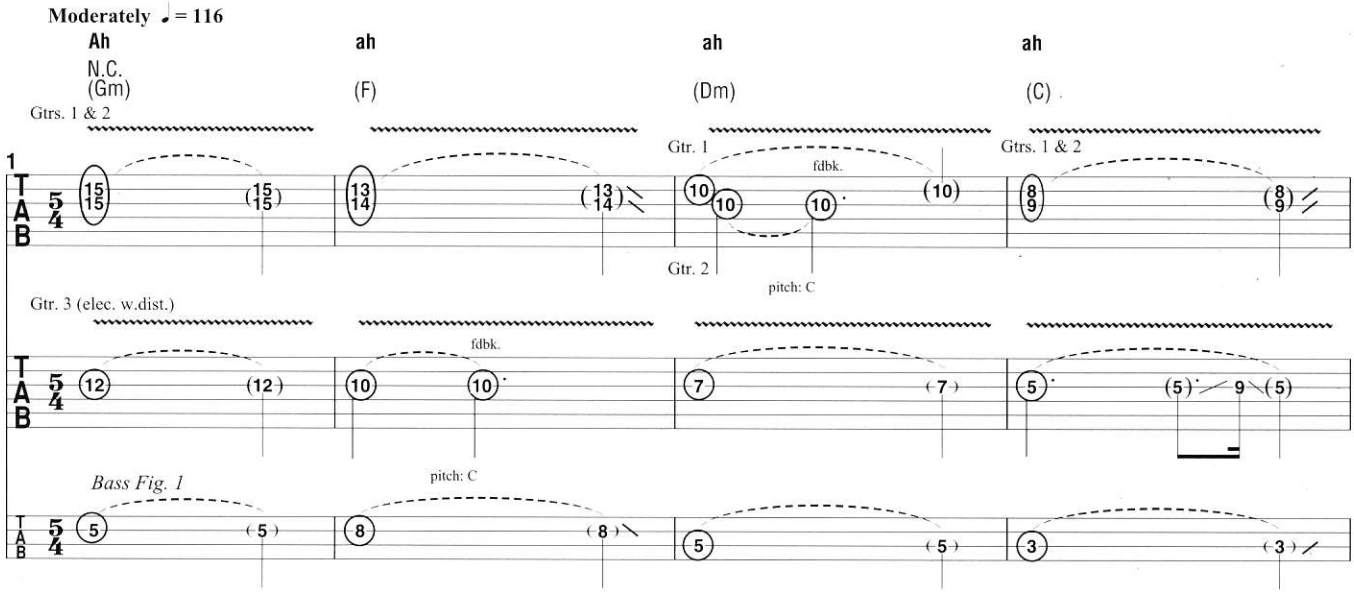
"WHITE ROOM" CREAM

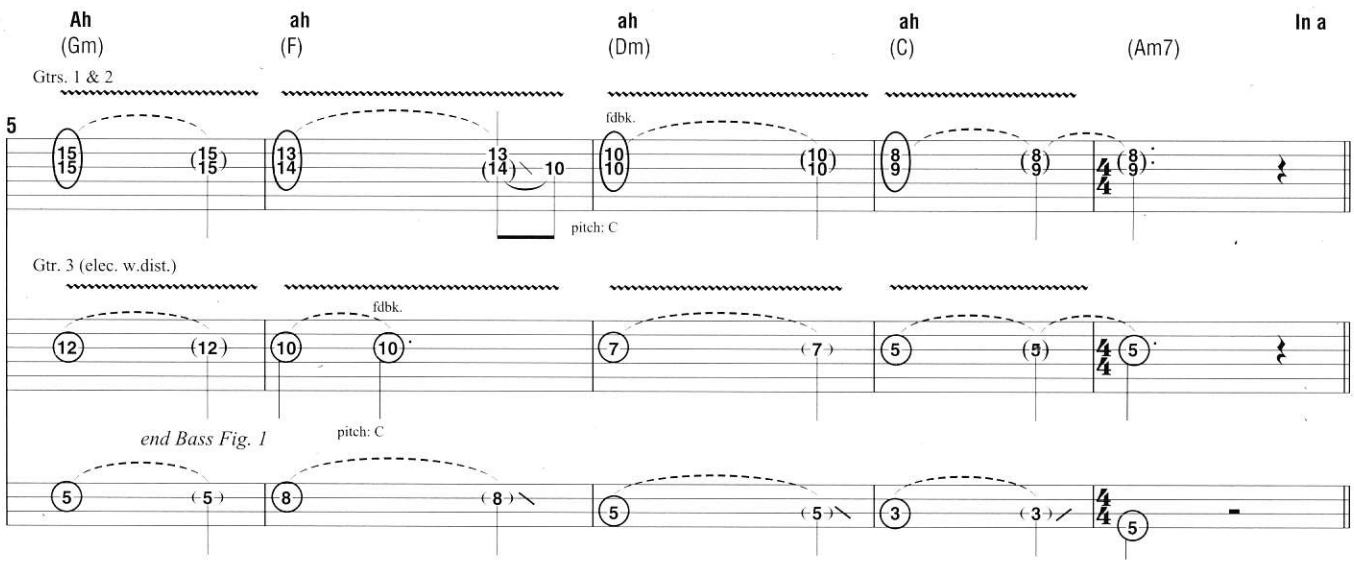
As heard on **WHEELS OF FIRE** (POLYDOR)
Words and Music by **John Bruce and Peter Constantine Brown** • *Transcribed by* **Andy Aledort**



A **Intro** (0:01)

Moderately ♩ = 116





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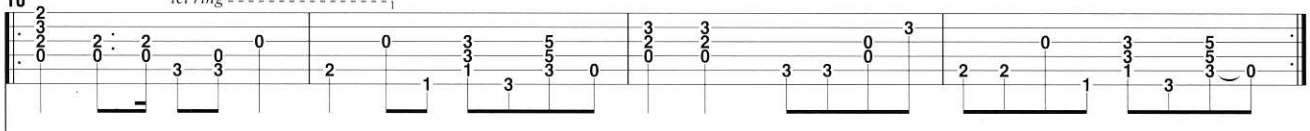
B **1st Verse** (0:24)

white room with black curtains near the station Black roof
country no gold pavements tired starlings Wild

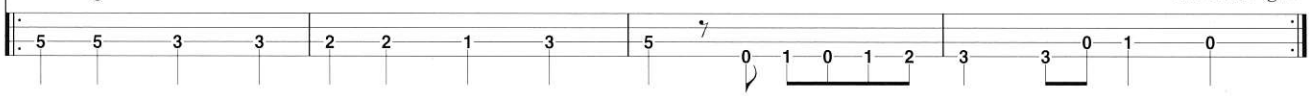
D Csus2 G/B B♭5 C5 D Csus2 G/B B♭5 C5

Rhy. Fig. 1

10 Gtr. 1 *let ring*



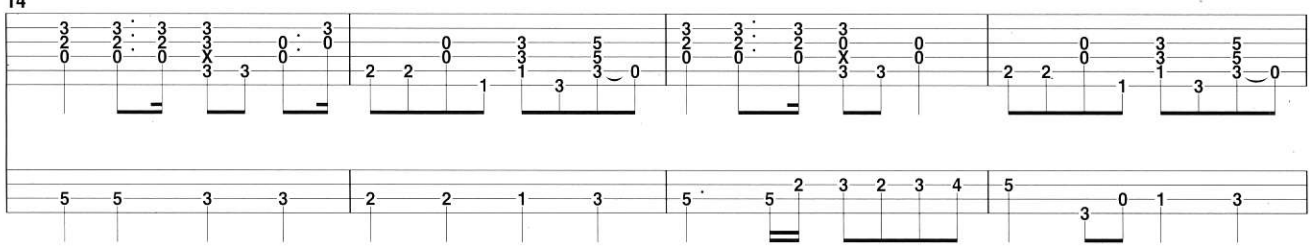
Bass Fig. 2 *end Bass Fig. 2*



horses ran down moonbeams In your dark eyes Dawn light

D Csus2 G/B B♭5 C5 D Csus2 G/B B♭5 C5

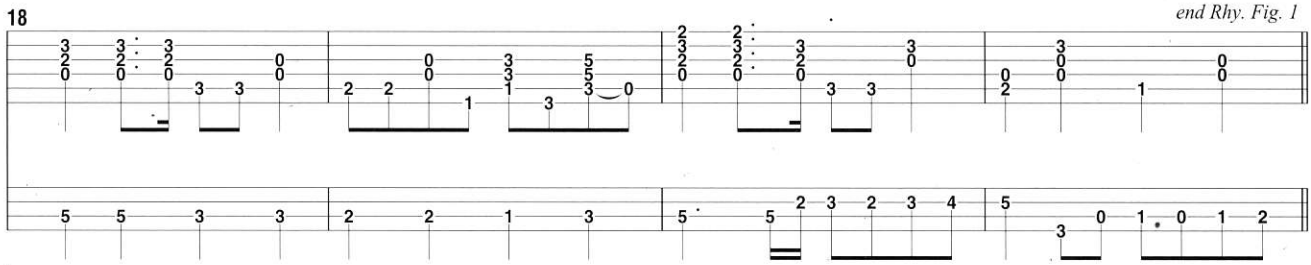
14



smile on you leaving my contentment I'll

D Csus2 G/B B♭5 C5 D Csus2 G/B Gm/B♭

18 *end Rhy. Fig. 1*

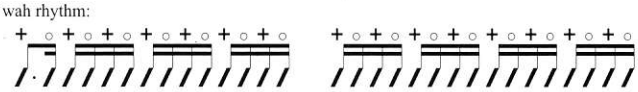


C **1st Bridge** (1:00)

wait in this place where the sun never shines Wait in this

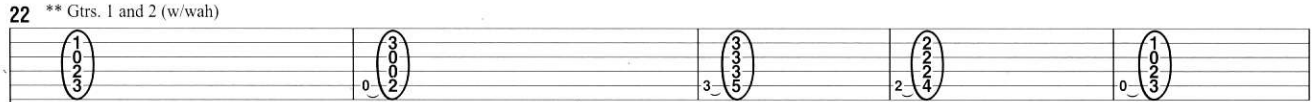
C G/B B♭ A C

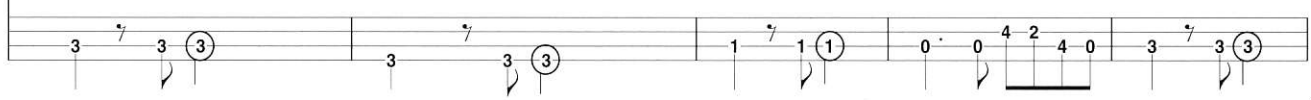
* wah rhythm:

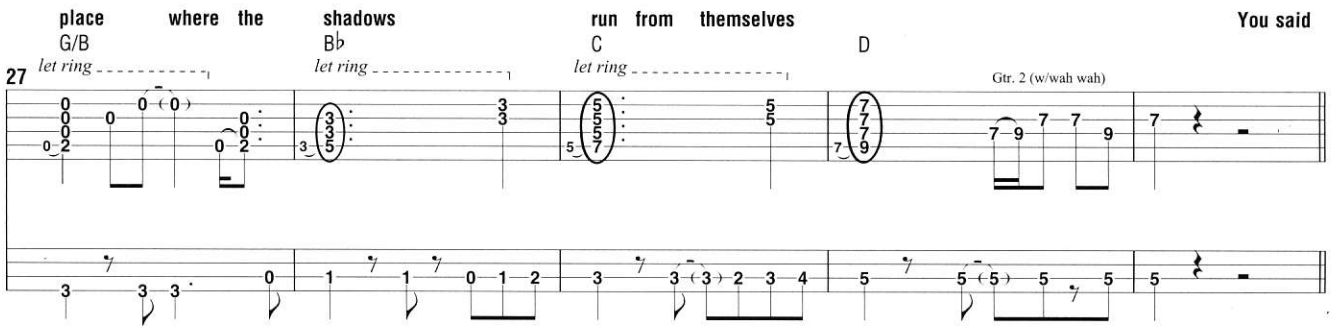


continue wah simile

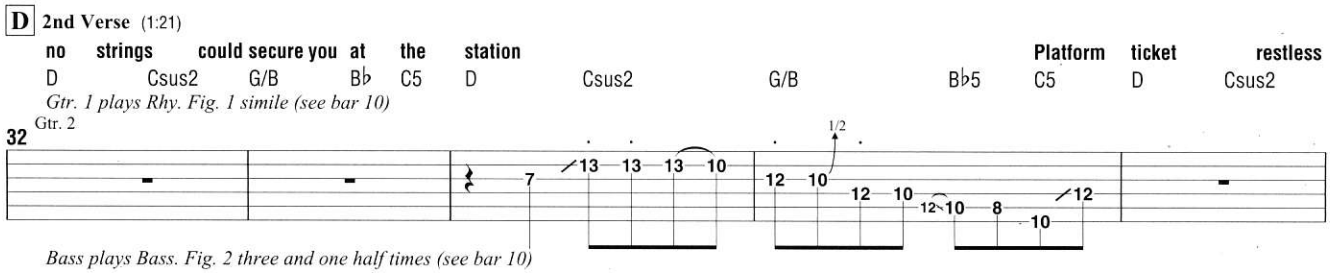
22 ** Gtrs. 1 and 2 (w/wah)



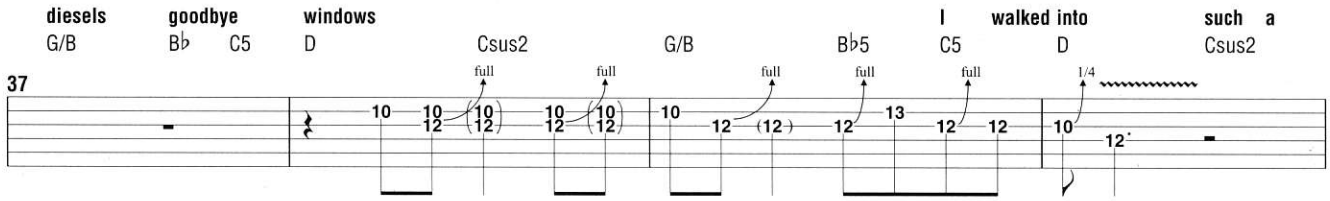
** + = treble position (toe down) o = bass position (toe up)*
*** two gtrs. arr. for one*

"WHITE ROOM"

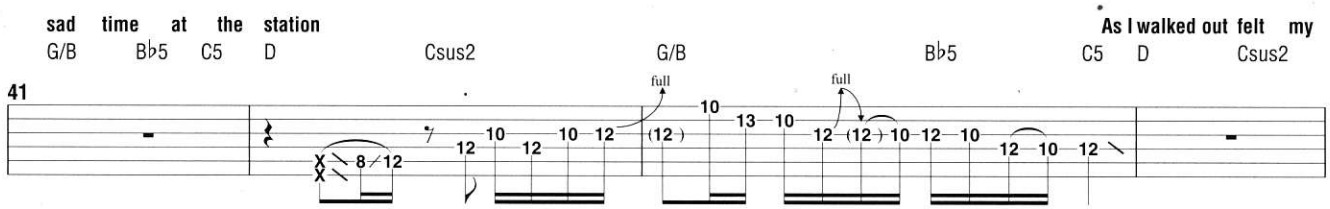


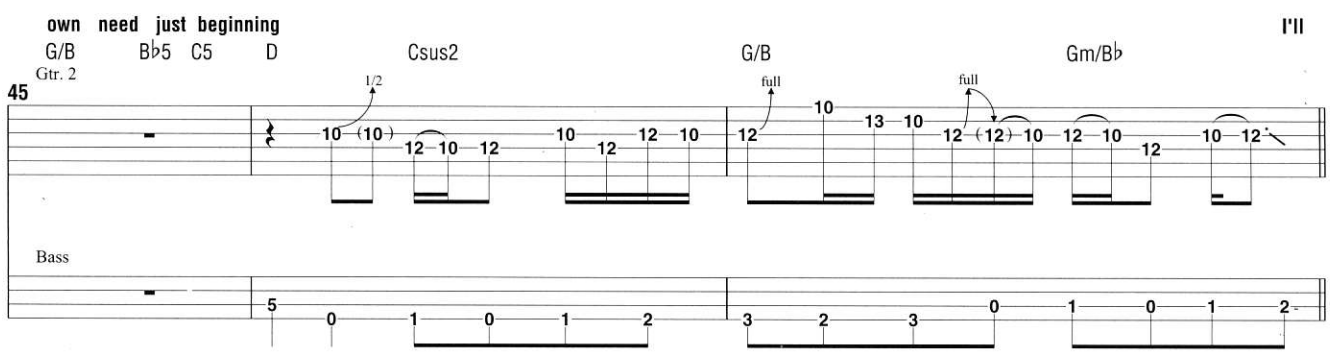
D **2nd Verse** (1:21)



Bass plays Bass. Fig. 2 three and one half times (see bar 10)







E **2nd Bridge** (1:56)

wait in the queue when the trains come back Lie with
C G/B B♭ A C

(rock wah pedal in rhythm indicated in bar 22)

48 *Gtrs. 1 and 2 *let ring* *Gtr. 2 plays Rhy. Fill 1 (see below)*

**two gtrs. arr. for one.*

Bass

you where the shadows run from themselves
G/B B♭ C D

let ring

53

F **1st Interlude** (2:15)

Ah ah ah ah
N.C.(Gm) (F) (Dm) (C)

57 Gtr. 1 fdbk.

Gtr. 2 pitch: C

Gtr. 3 fdbk. fdbk.

*Gtr. 4 (elec. w/dist.) pitch: C pitch: C

**Gtr. 4 plays bottom two notes*

Bass plays Bass Fig. 1 (see bar 1)

Ah ah ah ah At the
(Gm) (F) (Dm) (C) (Am7)

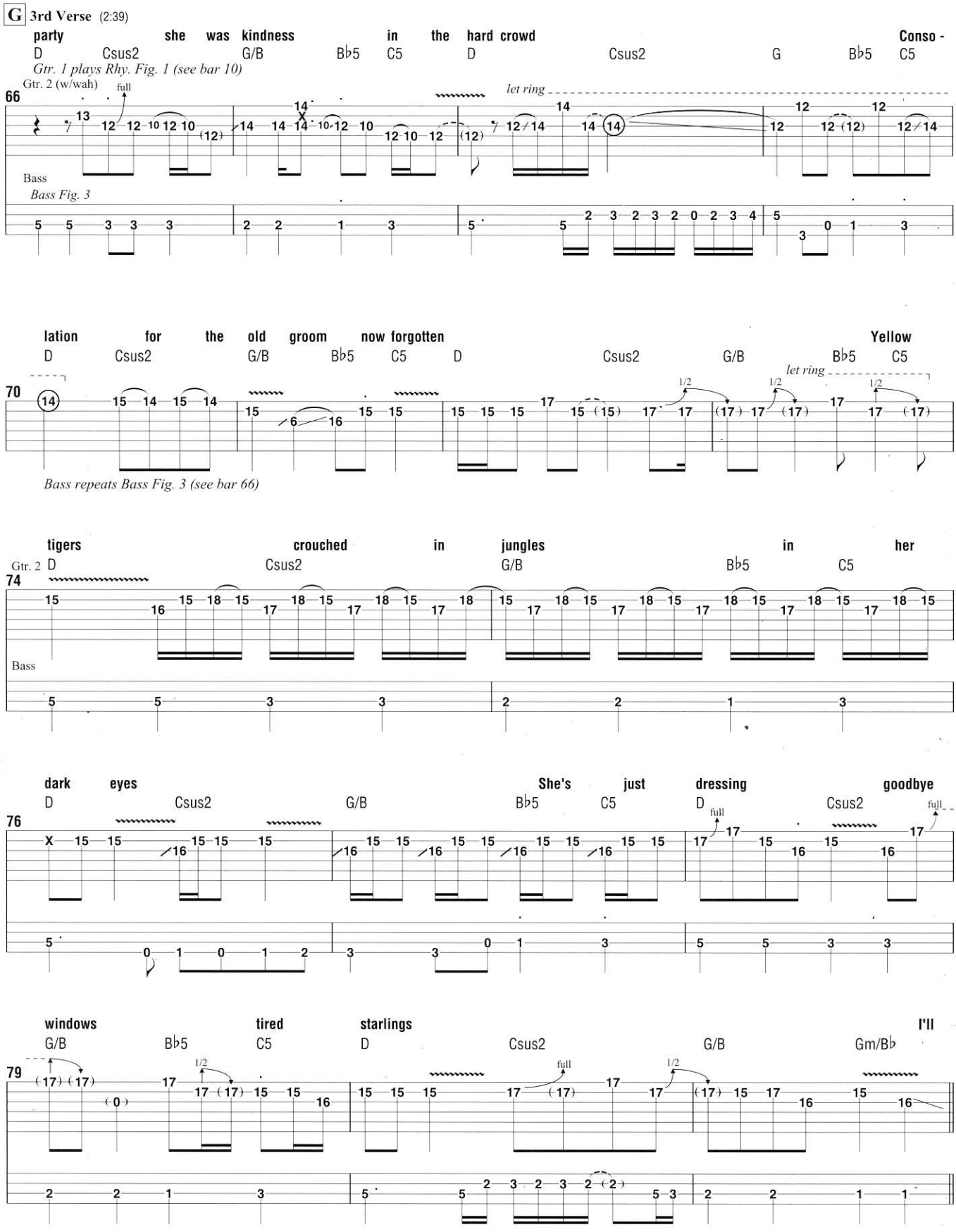
61 fdbk. pitch: C

fdbk. fdbk.

pitch: C pitch: C

Rhy. Fill 1 (2:02)
Gtr. 2 (w/wah)

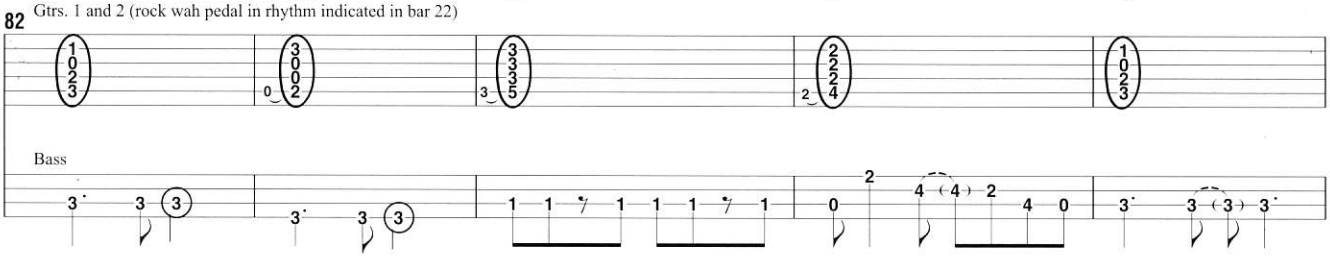
"WHITE ROOM"


G 3rd Verse (2:39)
party she was kindness in the hard crowd Conso -
D Csus2 G/B B♭5 C5 D Csus2 G B♭5 C5
Gtr. 1 plays Rhy. Fig. 1 (see bar 10)
Gtr. 2 (w/wah)
full
let ring
66
Bass
Bass Fig. 3
lation for the old groom now forgotten Yellow
D Csus2 G/B B♭5 C5 D Csus2 G/B B♭5 C5
let ring
70
Bass repeats Bass Fig. 3 (see bar 66)
tigers crouched in jungles in her
Gtr. 2
D Csus2 G/B B♭5 C5
74
Bass
dark eyes She's just dressing goodbye
D Csus2 G/B B♭5 C5 D Csus2
full
76
windows tired starlings I'll
G/B B♭5 C5 D Csus2 G/B Gm/B♭
79

H **3rd Bridge** (3:14)

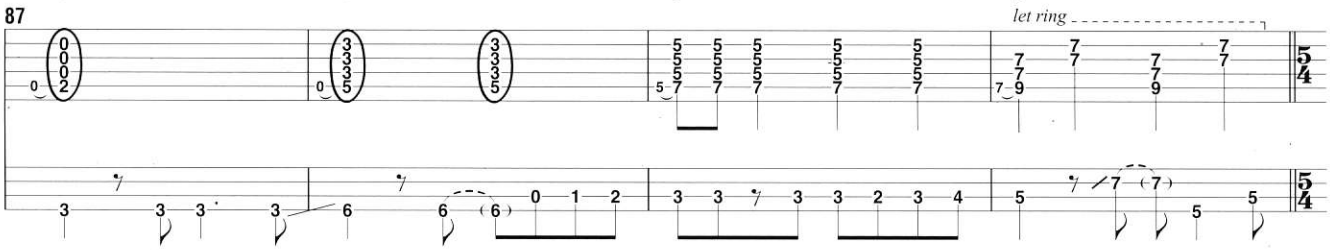
sleep in this place with the lonely crowd Lie in the
C G/B B♭ A C

82 Gtrs. 1 and 2 (rock wah pedal in rhythm indicated in bar 22)



dark where the shadows run from themselves
G/B B♭ C D

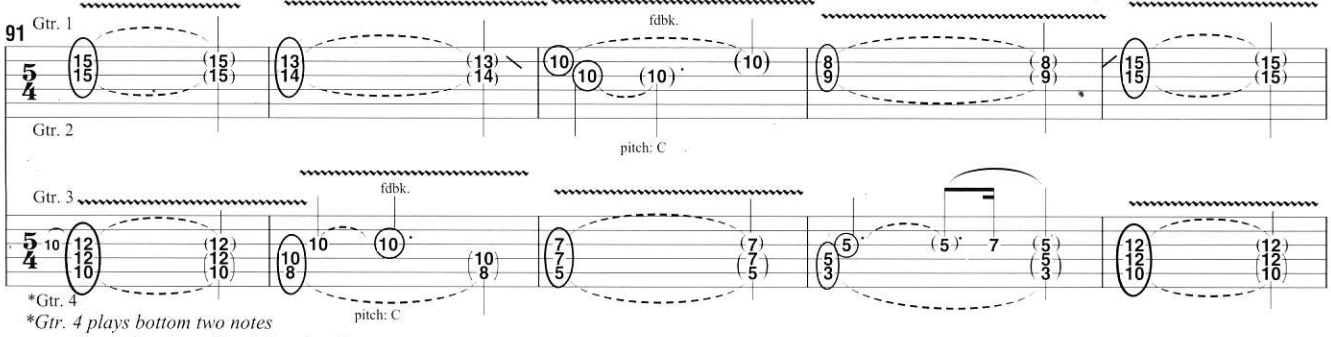
87 *let ring*



I **2nd Interlude** (3:33)

Ah ah ah ah Ah
N.C.(Gm) (F) (Dm) (C) (Gm)

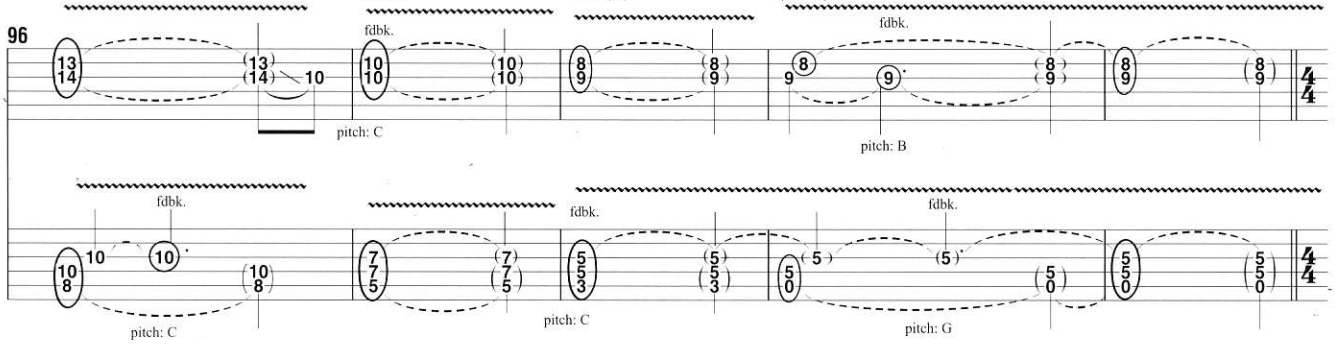
91 Gtr. 1



**Gtr. 4 plays bottom two notes*
Bass plays Bass Fig. 1 (see bar 1)

Ah Ah Ah
(F) (Dm) N.C.(C) (Am7)

96



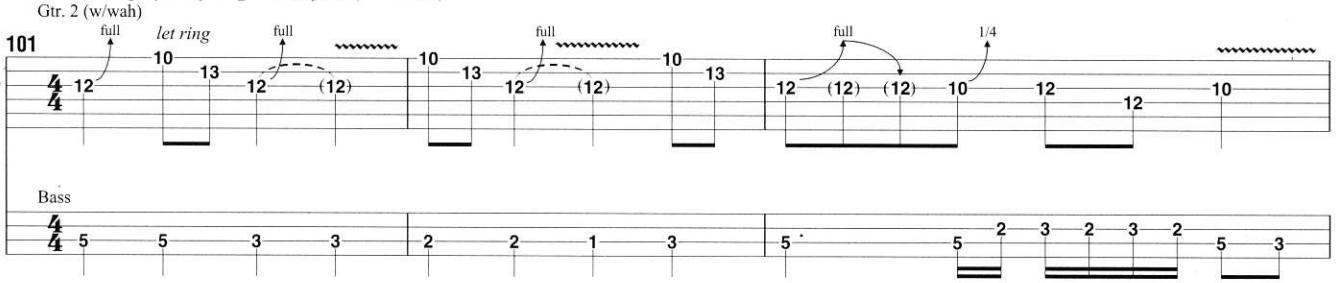
"WHITE ROOM"

J **Outro Guitar Solo** (4:01)

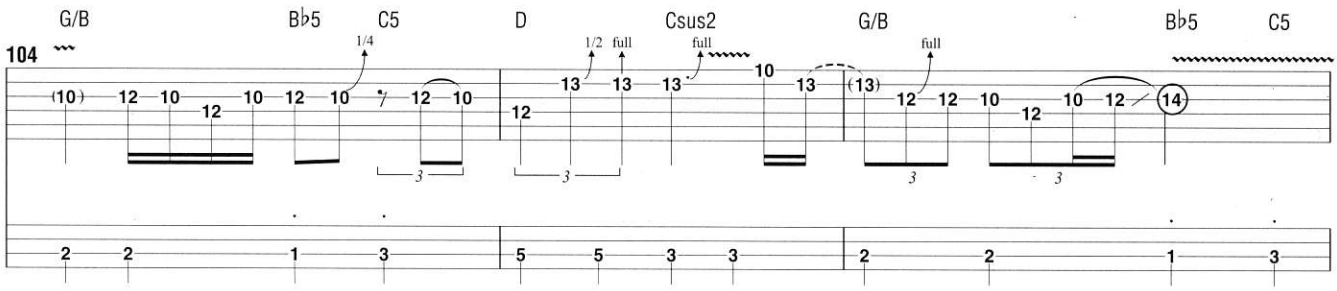
D Csus2 G/B B♭5 C5 D Csus2

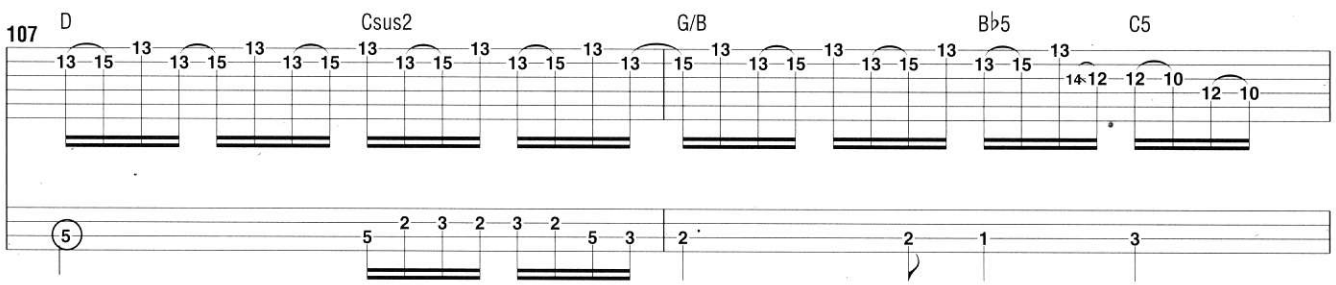
Gtr. 1 plays Rhy. Fig. 2 until fade (see below)

Gtr. 2 (w/wah)

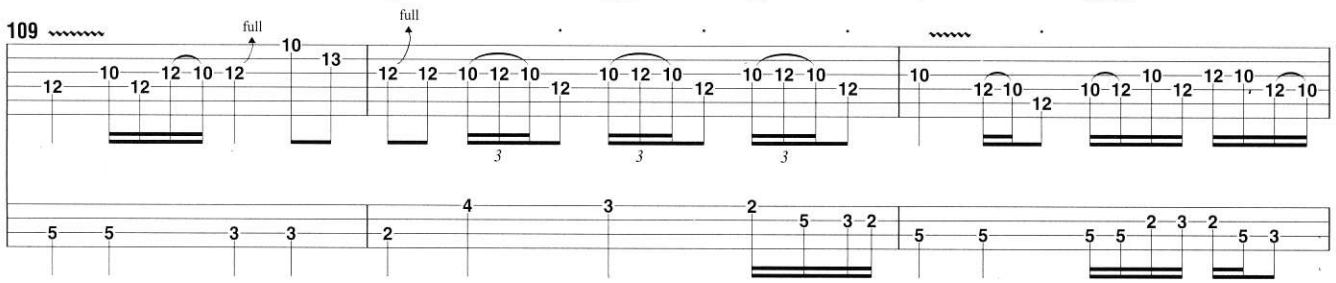


G/B B♭5 C5 D Csus2 G/B B♭5 C5



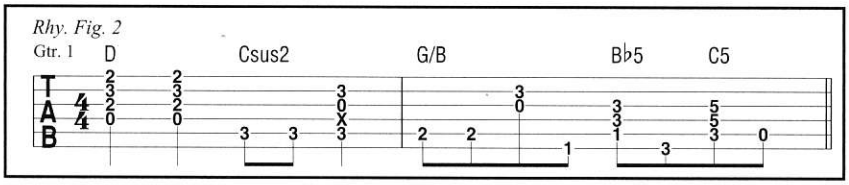


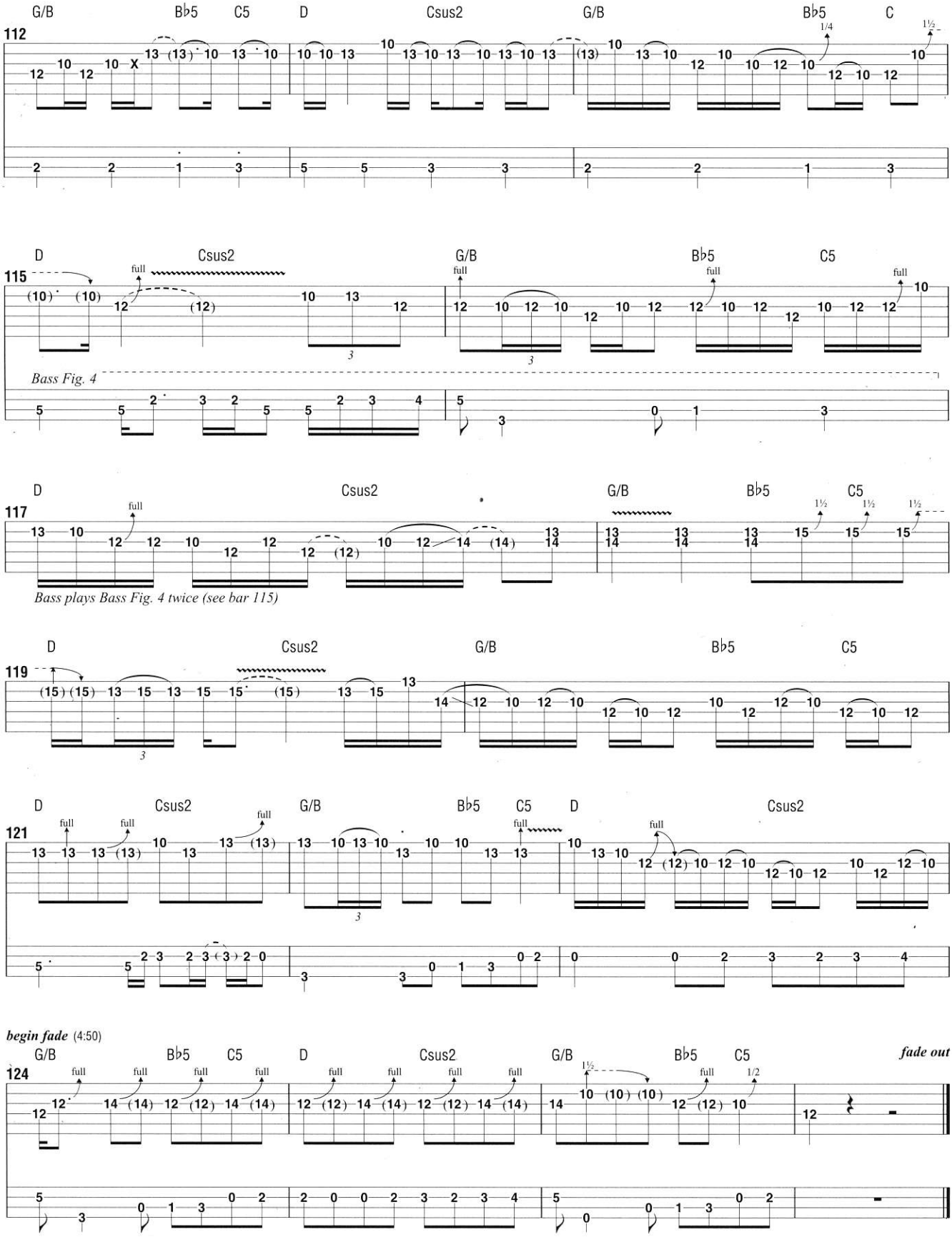
D Csus2 G/B Bb5 C5 D Csus2



Rhy. Fig. 2

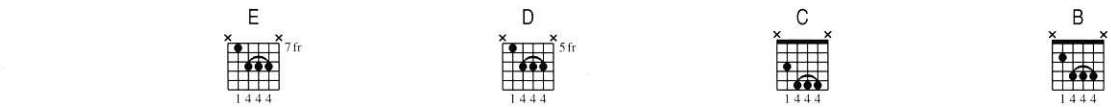
Gtr. 1 D Csus2 G/B B♭5 C5

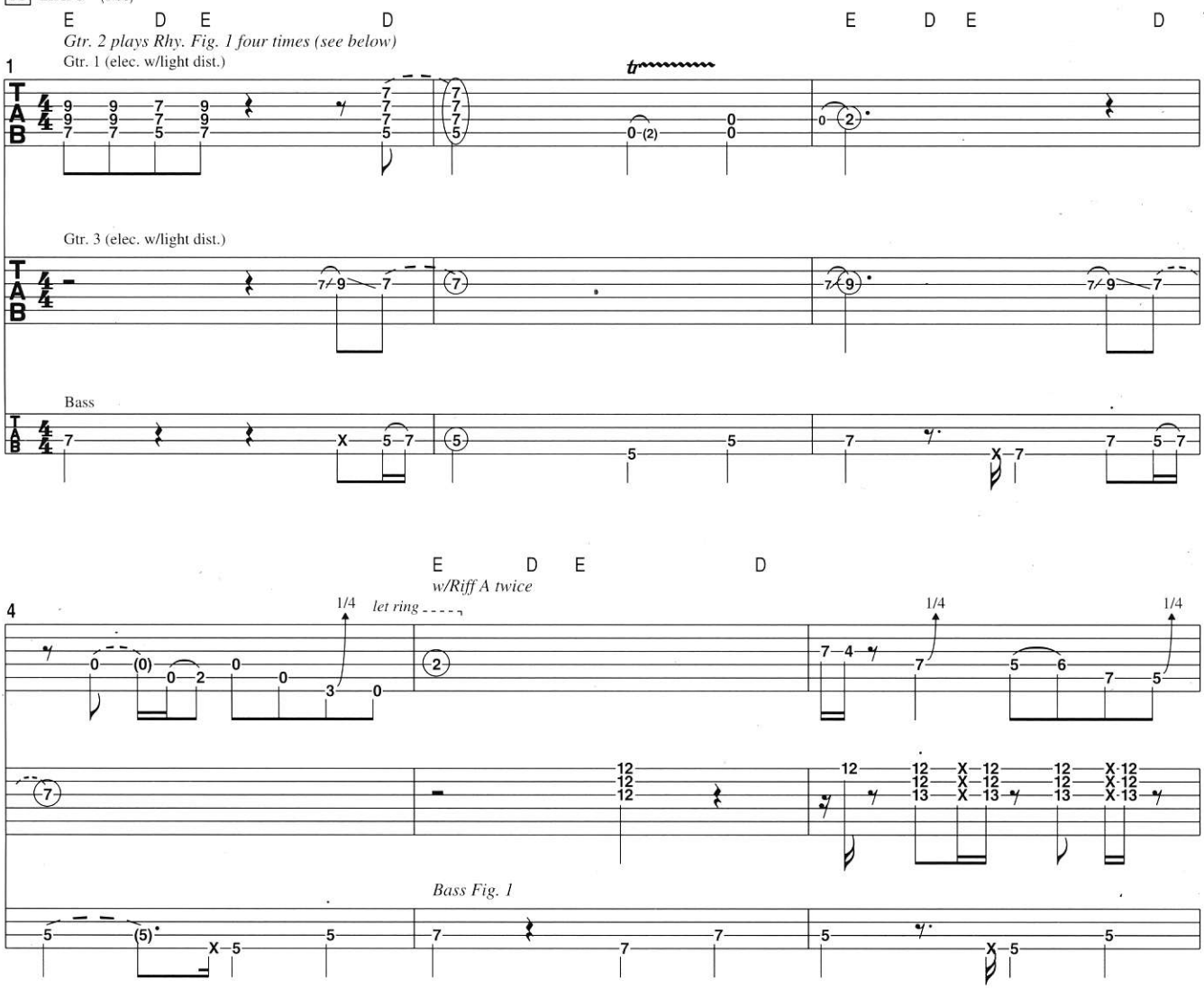


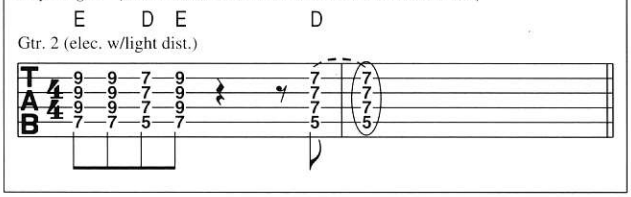

G/B
B♭5
C5
D
Csus2
112
115
117
119
121
124
Bass Fig. 4
Bass plays Bass Fig. 4 twice (see bar 115)
begin fade (4:50)
fade out
full
1/4
1/2

"COCAINE" ERIC CLAPTON

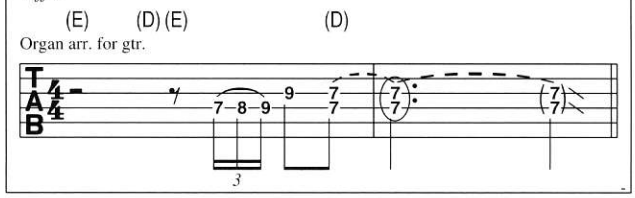
As heard on **SLOWHAND** (POLYDOR)
Words and Music by **J. J. Cale** • *Transcribed by* **Andy Aledort**



A **Intro** (0:00)

Rhy. Fig. 1 (0:00, 0:18, 0:41, 0:51, 1:13, 1:22, 2:17, 2:40, 2:54, 3:03)



Riff A



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B **Verses** (0:18, 0:51, 2:17)

1. If you wanna hang out you've got to take her out Cocaine
(2.) got bad news you wanna kick them blues Cocaine
(3.) thing is gone and you wanna ride on Cocaine

E D E D E D E D

Gtr. 2 plays Rhy. Fig. 1 three times (see previous page)
Gtr. 3 substitutes Rhy. Fill 1 on 2nd Verse (see meas. 13)
w/Riff A four times

7

let ring 1/4

(repeat previous bar)

end Bass Fig. 1

If you wanna get down down on the ground Cocaine
When your day is done and you wanna run Cocaine
Don't forget this fact you can't get it back Cocaine

E D E D E D E D

11 Gtr. 3

Rhy. Fill 1

Bass

Bass Fig. 2

3rd time, skip ahead to **D**

She don't lie she don't lie she don't lie Cocaine

E D E D E D C B

15 Gtr. 2

Rhy. Fig. 2

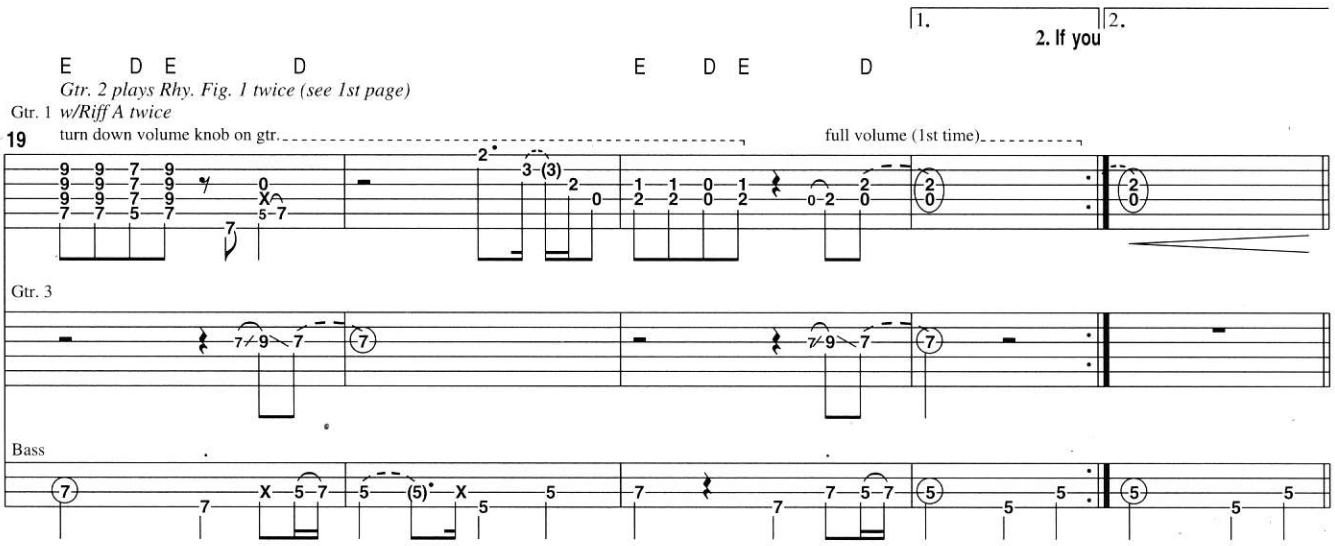
end Rhy. Fig. 2

Gtr. 3

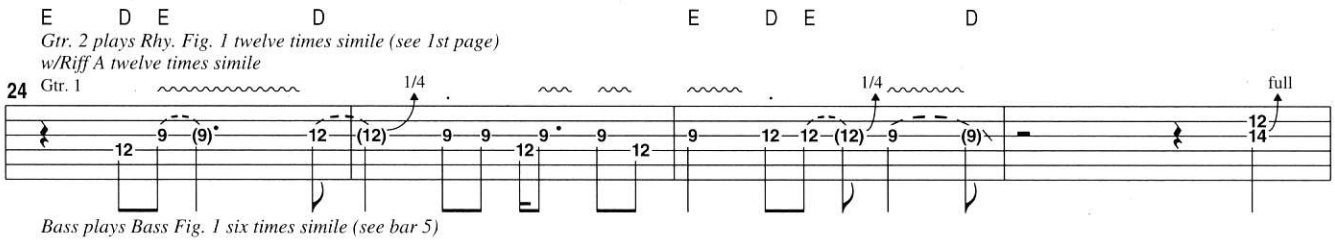
Bass

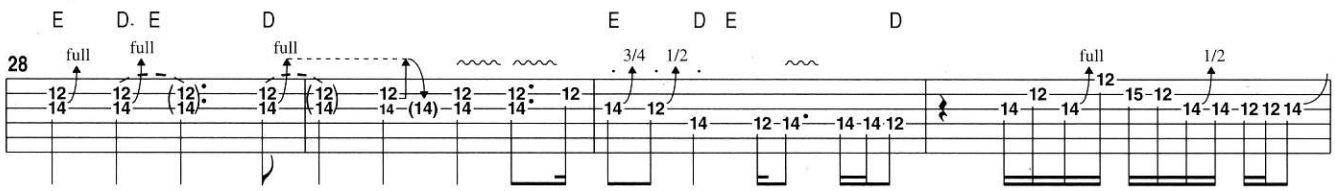
end Bass Fig. 2

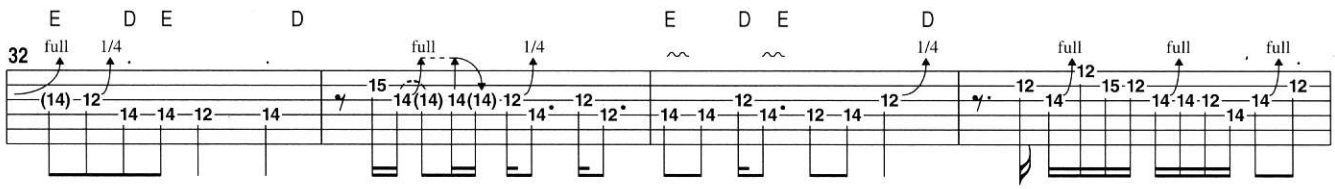
"COCAINE"

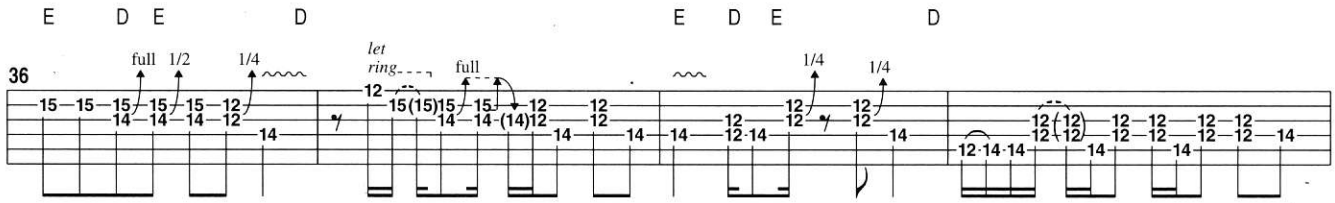
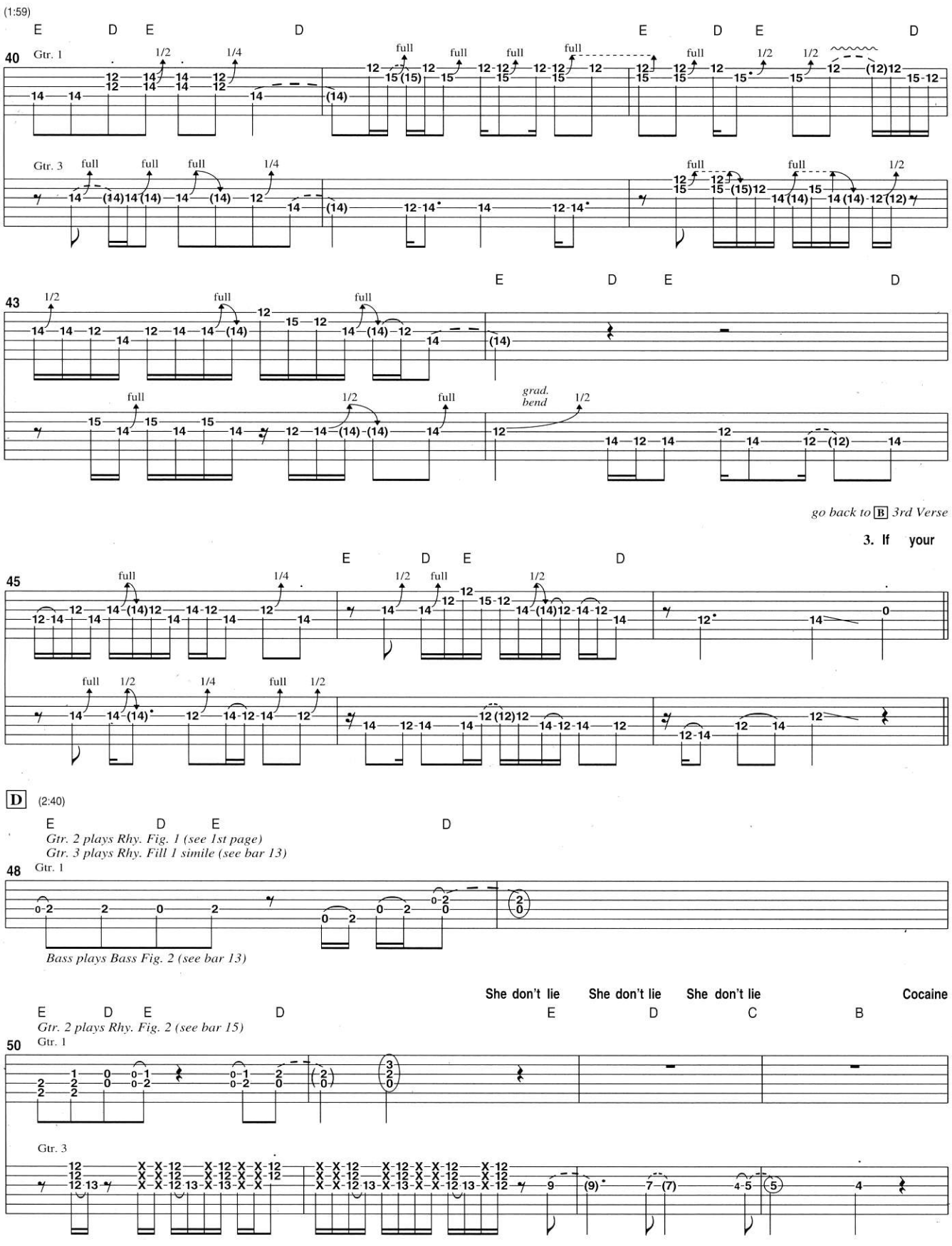


C Guitar Solo (1:22)

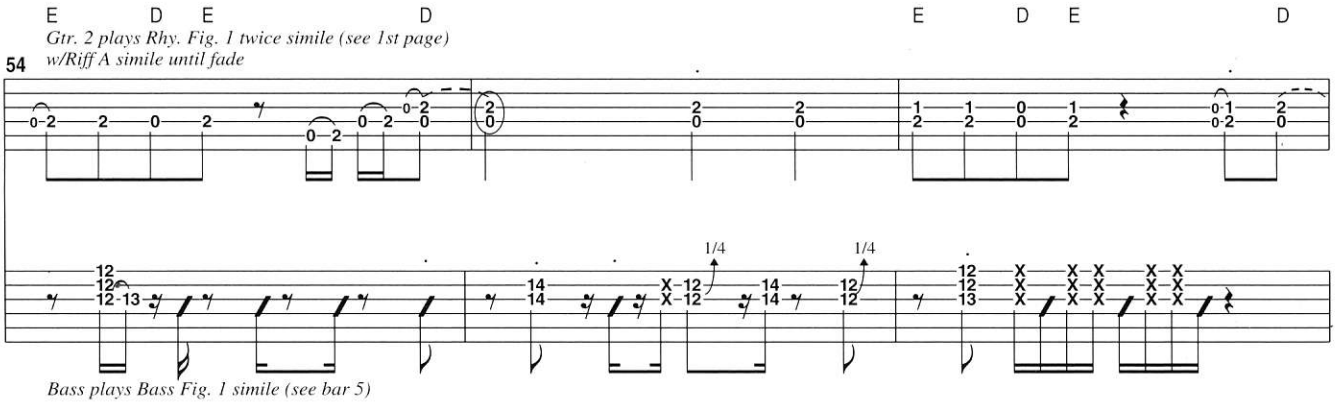




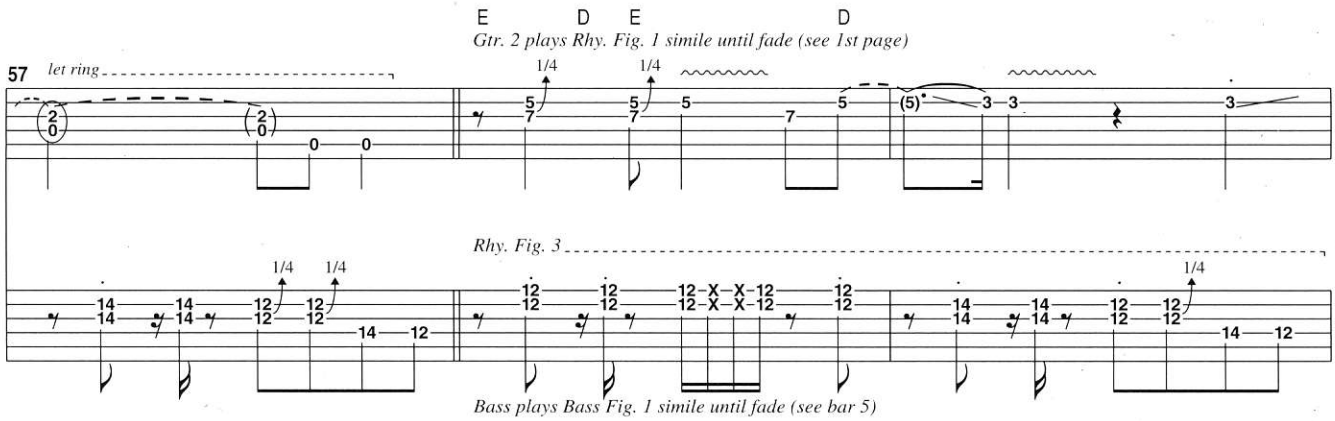


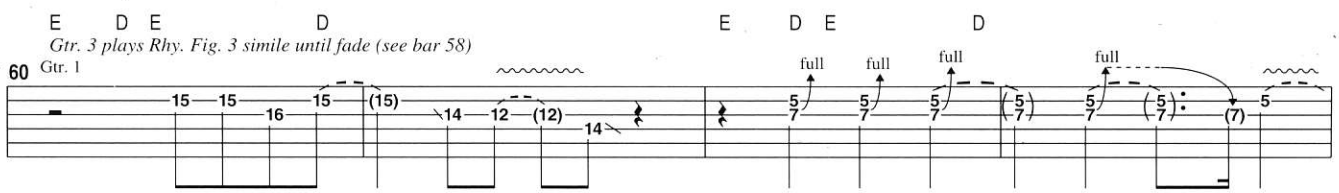


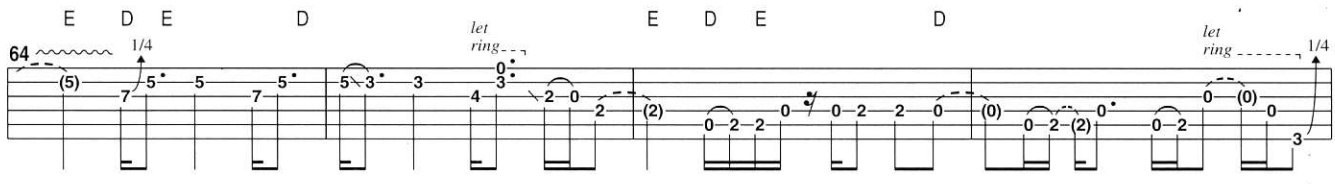
(1:59)
E D E D
40 Gtr. 1
Gtr. 3
E D E D
43
go back to B 3rd Verse
3. If your
E D E D
45
D (2:40)
E D E D
Gtr. 2 plays Rhy. Fig. 1 (see 1st page)
Gtr. 3 plays Rhy. Fill 1 simile (see bar 13)
48 Gtr. 1
Bass plays Bass Fig. 2 (see bar 13)
She don't lie She don't lie She don't lie Cocaine
E D E D E D C B
Gtr. 2 plays Rhy. Fig. 2 (see bar 15)
50 Gtr. 1
Gtr. 3

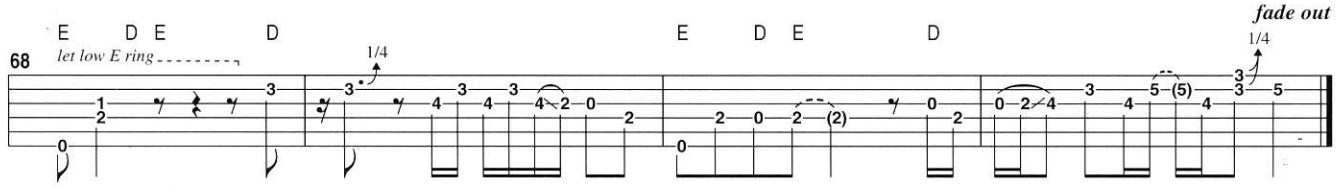

E D E D E D E D
Gtr. 2 plays Rhy. Fig. 1 twice simile (see 1st page)
54
w/Riff A simile until fade
1/4
1/4
Bass plays Bass Fig. 1 simile (see bar 5)

E Outro (3:03)


E D E D
Gtr. 2 plays Rhy. Fig. 1 simile until fade (see 1st page)
57
let ring
1/4
1/4
Rhy. Fig. 3
Bass plays Bass Fig. 1 simile until fade (see bar 5)


E D E D E D E D
Gtr. 3 plays Rhy. Fig. 3 simile until fade (see bar 58)
60
Gtr. 1
full
full
full
full


E D E D E D E D
64
1/4
let ring
let ring
1/4


E D E D E D E D
68
let low E ring
1/4
fade out
1/4

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